

ཁྱེད་ལ་ Tibetan Whispers



by ཀུ་རུ་ཕའི་རི་ས་
Gu ru 'phrin las

HP 65: ཁྱེད་ལ་ TIBETAN WHISPERS

Gu ru 'phrin las

The stories, article, translation, and scripts in this volume are from *Remembering Tomorrow*, *Good Boys Never Cry*, *Silent Women*, and *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63.



AHP #65 རྒྱལ་ལབ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས། Gu ru 'phrin las



TIBETAN WHISPERS

by

གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས། Gu ru 'phrin las

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FRONT COVER: Young woman [Smin thang སྐྱེན་ཐང་། (Mentang 门堂) Township, Gcig sgril ཀཅིག་གླིང་། (Jiuzhi 久治) County, Mgo log མགོ་ལོག་། (Guoluo 果洛) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒྲོན་། (Qinghai 青海) Province, PR China (2020 གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལཱ། Gu ru 'phrin las)]

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TIBETAN AND CHINESE TERMS

Tibetan names and terms appear in phonetic renderings of the Golok (Mgo log, Guoluo) Tibetan dialect and are given at the back of the book in Wylie and Tibetan script. Chinese terms are given in Pinyin and Chinese characters as appropriate.


PHOTOGRAPHS

I took most of the photos featured in this collection in my home area in 2016, except for a few taken by my relatives, which were also taken in the same pastoral area.

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I thank my parents and family for their unwavering support and Gabriela Samcewicz and Sarge for their assistance.

INTRODUCTION

he stories, article, translation, and scripts in this volume are from *Remembering Tomorrow*,¹ *Good Boys Never Cry*,² *Silent Women*,³ and *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63.⁴

The climate is harsh at an elevation of about 4,000 meters in my native grassland – Smin thang (Mentang) Township, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Golok (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China. It was here that I was born on the Tibetan Plateau in a black yak-hair tent near the Rma chu "Yellow River" at the foot of a high mountain in my family's summer camp with my paternal grandmother helping Mother to give birth.

My family had around a hundred yaks, fifty sheep, and ten horses when I was a child. My father herded the sheep and horses while my mother herded our yaks until my oldest sister was old enough to assume this duty. Meanwhile, my grandmother, a tall, beautiful woman, tended to my four siblings and me.

My family has winter and summer pastures. As a child, we moved seasonally between the two, living in black yak-hair tents until 1997, when my family built a one-story packed-earth house in the winter pasture. The roof was made using several long poles placed across the top of the walls and covered with boards. A layer of thick plastic covered with shrubs was put atop the boards, followed by a layer of soil. The

¹ <https://bitly.ws/xYWX>, accessed 24 September 2023.

² <http://bitly.ws/wgMg>, accessed 20 September 2023.

³ <https://bitly.ws/RHrL>, accessed 20 September 2023.

⁴ <https://bitly.ws/TLwp>, accessed 3 September 2023.

house had a living room, a shrine room, and a storeroom for food, clothes, and other articles. All my family members slept in the living room on cushions placed on the wooden floor, except for Grandmother, who slept on a wooden bed in the storeroom.

My grandmother, siblings, and I lived in the house from the eleventh to fifth lunar months. My parents did not spend much time at our house, though they wanted to. They had no real choice. Our family's economic mainstay was our livestock, so they camped and moved with them, ensuring they had forage.

This arrangement continued for ten years until Father hired Tibetans from Sichuan Province to build a stone house of three rooms on the same site as our first house.

Butter lamps were our light at night until 1997 when my family bought a solar panel electricity generating system. At that time, children had few toys, and there was no TV to watch, so I asked Grandmother to tell me stories when I was bored. Sometimes I sat on her lap as she sat near the door of my family's house door, basking in the sunshine. She often wore a sheepskin robe without a shirt and told me about the earth – which was flat and bounded by a limitless ocean. This was beyond my ability to comprehend since I could only envision my family's summer and winter pastures surrounded by high mountains.

The years with my grandmother, my primary caregiver, remain the most memorable time of my life. She was a gifted storyteller and told me stories whenever I asked, including folktales and stories about her life. I was mesmerized, although my keen interest was partly due to a lack of television and radio.

Grandmother was fond of *zamba*, so that's what we often ate, along with milk tea. We also ate fried bread prepared for Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' that had not been consumed during the festival. Besides *zamba*, and mutton, and beef, Grandmother also boiled yak and sheep bones in a big pot for hours. We mixed the resulting oil with *zamba*. We seldom cooked noodles and baked bread.

I wore sheepskin robes Father and his cousin made and leather boots that Grandmother and Mother crafted, which we rubbed with oil or butter to soften.

When Father was about eight years old, he attended a local tent school and learned basic math and how to read and write Tibetan. Required to herd, he was unable to study for very long. He was my first teacher. After supper, by the light of a smoky, flickering butter lamp, he taught Tibetan to my brother and me and how to count from one to a hundred. We used a dirty, torn elementary Tibetan book. Father dictated what he taught, and my brother and I used sticks and wrote what we learned in the ash-covered hearth. We had no arithmetic book. Father wrote numbers on the ground, which we copied.

Father knows very little Chinese.

When I was eight, I began learning Chinese when I enrolled in a local primary school. I studied English in middle school and high school.

My brother and I herded my family's calves from the sixth to the eighth lunar months until we returned to school. Mother gave us two balls of *zamba* and a military canteen filled with boiled milk. We swam in a branch of the Yellow River on hot days, keeping one eye on the calves to ensure they didn't find their mothers and leave them with no milk. Among the grassland flowers, we ate our *zamba*, which remains the most delicious food I've ever had.

In September, we were responsible for our horses. We did not need to pay much attention during the day, but we had to cross several high mountains and drive them home in the evening.

My grandmother profoundly impacted my personality and my interests. I enjoy visiting elders, spending time with them, and listening to accounts of their lives. I prefer this to watching films at home and reading. Elders' stories help me appreciate their lives; through that window, the differences between their lives and mine come into focus, allowing me to understand myself better.

The stories in my first short story collection, *Remembering Tomorrow*,⁵ are the lives of those I grew up with. I was fortunate to write such narratives before I forgot or remembered them dimly. I was born at a time and in a place to experience traditional life in the company of lifelong herders. My childhood universe was little different from my elders' childhoods, empowering me to comprehend better and interpret memories of their world. My children and grandchildren may want to know about my parents' and grandparents' lives. *Remembering Tomorrow* is a portal providing entrée to understand the past.

Many changes have come to my home area since 2010. Locals now have permanent houses and live in fabric tents in summer. Black yak-hair tents are gone. Every household owns a TV and motorcycle. More affluent families have cars. Families no longer pack their belongings on yaks in moves between pastures. Most people use phones; consequently, there is much less visiting. The Tibetan New Year period and weddings are some of the few times locals gather and chat. Many families have sold their livestock and moved to the township town to operate small shops and restaurants. Few young people continue herding. As a result, the former sense of a tightly bound community is weakening.

The stories in *Good Boys Never Cry* were inspired by the pre-modern world of my childhood with pastoral people and the challenges local people face - particularly women - as the traditional world crumbles. Observing those around me, I realize their lives are imperfect and not what some might expect, which motivates

⁵ <https://bitly.ws/xYWX>, accessed 26 September 2023. Films I made include *Jeopardy* <https://bitly.ws/VFWX>; *A Tibetan Herdswoman* <https://bitly.ws/VFXc>; *Painful Transformation* <https://bitly.ws/VFXs>; and *Inspiration* <https://bitly.ws/wxHc>. See Chos skyong skyabs <https://bitly.ws/Vxct> for reviews of my films.

me to write about relevant issues. It's important to care about human emotions and reveal social issues that make people unhappy. For example, rumors about and judgments of others are powerful and can seriously damage a person. For this reason, they figure prominently in my stories and play a significant role in every society. Another issue is men abusing their wives. This common cross-cultural sadness is often ignored, especially in male-dominated societies. It's helpful to illustrate problems again and again.

Seeing and experiencing the world beyond traditional pastoral areas allows one to see, experience, and be empowered. Pastoral youth with deep roots in herding areas have worldviews that drive cultural changes and generational conflicts, given the distance between their conceptions of the world. However, I am not challenged in communicating with teenagers in my home area, though their living conditions are much better than what I experienced at their age. This is partly because I am keenly interested in their lives, joys, and challenges and ask questions. They also have much better access to educational resources and opportunities as compared to my experiences, thanks to today's technology facilitating the acquisition of knowledge related to a vast range of things. For example, the story that features a woman with epilepsy illustrates how local pastoralists traditionally interpret illness from a religious perspective but are willing to learn and seek modern medical solutions.

The Painting (a script) portrays a female Tibetan university student suffering from breaking up with her boyfriend. Subsequently, her painting teacher has sex with her after she is drunk in his apartment. Still later, a female classmate is kind to her, touches her, and she falls in love with her.

In *Silent Women* (a script), Lhadzom was raised by her paternal grandmother, Drakyi, who passed away when Lhadzom was still a child. Unable to accept this, Lhadzom hopes Drakyi will soon return. When Dzebo gives crystal sugar and tells stories to her grandchildren, Lhadzom's playmates, Drogon and Lhamo, Lhadzom misses Drakyi even more.

Later, Lhadzom learns her maternal grandmother, Tsoko, is alive and is eager to visit her. Lhadzom's mother, Tsomo, promises to take Lhadzom with her the next time she visits Tsoko. Lhadzom is angry when Tsomo doesn't do this and resolves to visit Tsoko alone once she is old enough.

Lhadzom chooses her marriage partner, unlike her peers whose parents find suitable spouses for their children. After marrying, Wangchuk, her husband, sells their yaks after Lhadzom gives birth to their son, Ngakwang. The family moves to the local township town and opens a small shop.

Lhadzom learns to drive a motorcycle and car. Her traditional mother-in-law, Lutso, disapproves because she believes it is improper for a herdsman to do this

because others will gossip that Wangchuk cannot control his wife and is thus not a real man. This will destroy the family's reputation.

In time, Lhadzom drives her family's car to visit Tsoko and takes her mother, Tsomo. During this trip, Lhadzom comes to understand Tsomo did not take her to visit Tsoko when she was a child because she was afraid Lhadzom would describe family quarrels, including stories of her father, Dele, beating her mother, Tsomo. She knew this would make Tsoko unhappy, especially since she had arranged Tsomo's marriage.

Lhadzom doesn't take her son, Ngakwang, with her to visit Tsoko because he would likely tell Tsoko that Wangchuk, his father, beats his mother, upsetting Tsoko and Tsomo. Lhadzom now better understands her mother.

The tension between Lhadzom and her traditional mother-in-law, Lutso, builds with Lutso finally moving to a local monastery and living with her sister.

Meanwhile, Wangchuk wanders, gambles, has girlfriends, and rarely stays home.

Lhadzom goes on pilgrimage to Lhasa with her friends, and feels free from life's pressures and hopes the journey will never end.

“Yak Herders Are the Cosmic Sun”: A *Mgo log Herdswoman’s Singing Life* describes a herdswoman’s childhood. While herding her family calves with her siblings and herdmates, they sing herding songs while herding calves on the mountains. The main character learns songs from her mother and neighbors. Her mother arranges a marriage for her, and she accepts it.

In the translation, a woman receives a birthday gift, a piece of turquoise, from her great-grandmother. She regards it as the most precious gift she has ever received.

གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལག།

PART ONE: REMEMBERING TOMORROW

ACCLAIM

Richly contextualized and in succinct, fluent English, Gu ru 'phrin las is intimately familiar but also removed from the world he describes. His stories are more than personal childhood reminiscences for they are collective memories of the many Tibetans with a herding background who grew up in a black yak-hair tent (including me) but who now rarely see such a tent in their homeland. While the stories illustrate a life that might be described as unsophisticated and impoverished, dotted with moments of sincere compassion, they do not avoid the complex brutality and revengeful emotions that are also an integral part of this life.

Antagonistic values and tangled emotions are displayed mirror-like, one reflecting the other. A little girl admires children who had changed their grass insoles during Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year', but these same children admire her for being allowed to sleep as long as she wants. A boy's understanding and interpretation of his brother, "the crazy monk," is more profound than his father's. Eight yaks paid for the death of a poor family's son is compared to eighty yaks in compensation for the revenge death of a rich family's son.

These stories challenge the reader in a multitude of ways. Are they memories or imaginings, fictional creations or lived realities, remnants of the past or tomorrow's authenticities?

Rig grol རིག་གྲོ། Victoria University, Australia

Gu ru 'phrin las echoes his grandmother's voice in nineteen short stories, vividly narrating unadulterated Plateau life in a Tibetan herding community. While the grassland is fragrant flowers and colorful rainbows of aching beauty, it is also harsh winter snowstorms and their lethal consequences. Yak-hair tents, herding livestock, hunting wildlife, compassion and sin, challenges confronting women, moving between summer and winter pastures, young men's rivalry and bloody conflicts over girls, bandits and livestock theft, complex mental turmoil, and much more are featured. Why is it taboo for a guest to visit a family with an infant at night? Why should women not butcher animals? Why do herders kill lambs during blizzards? This pool of accounts is a rich ethnographic resource characterizing herding lives and is a must read for those interested in Plateau lives.

Kelsang Norbu (Gesang Nuobu, Skäl bzang nor bu ཀལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ།)

Gu ru 'phrin las, a local Tibetan, created a life for himself beyond his home herding community on the Tibet Plateau, and when he was granted an opportunity to study in a major Chinese city. It is within this physical remove from his birthplace that he recounts stories based on memories of community life and relationships that a time-traveler would find little changed from a thousand years ago. Grandparents, parents, children, boys, girls, monks, customs, patterns of thought, and beliefs are revealed, reflecting a social existence in sharp contrast with what many might consider "ideal community life."

These stories are testimony to fundamental social transformations in the last few decades - changes that continue today at an exponential rate as the old is dismantled and replaced by the novel. With this in mind, engaging these narratives is a revelatory deciphering of embedded core values and an informed interrogation of tradition.

Dpal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྷན་བྲལ་གྱིས་ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

These nineteen, well-written narratives developed from the life experiences of a Tibetan elder, transport the reader into the actual lives of Tibetans inhabiting a remote pastoral area of A mdo. Told under the mantle of "fiction," Gu ru 'phrin las enriches our understanding of Tibetan pastoralists' lives, spirituality, livestock, and rangeland based on true life experiences.

Tshe dpal rdo rje ཅེ་དཔལ་ར་རྟེ་ University of Canterbury

What do children in herding areas do on the first day of Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' for good luck? What is the social status of women in Tibetan herding communities? What choices does a woman have if her fiancé has an affair with her mother? How do religious beliefs conflict with real life? How do young women deal with the conflict between arranged marriage and their desires? How do people seek justice within traditional social structures? Read *Remembering Tomorrow* for answers to these and other questions.

Duo Dala (Stobs stag lha ལྷོ་བས་སྟག་ལྷ་ལྷ) Erasmus University Rotterdam

This extraordinary collection of nineteen thoughtfully written stories reflects various aspects of a traditional herding society before being swept away by the speedy waves of modernity. The stories not only open a window for curious outsiders eager to glimpse the challenging herding way of life, but also serve an educational purpose, ensuring that future generations better understand people's cognitive perception of religion, animals, relationships, and methods of dealing with daily life dilemmas.

Li Jianfu 李建富 (Libu Lakhi, Zla ba bstan 'dzin ལྷ་བ་བསྟན་འཛིན་)

AHP #65 གྲུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གྲུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས། Gu ru 'phrin las

Gu ru 'phrin las' *Remembering Tomorrow* is a short story collection profoundly capturing the very essence of the premodern, A mdo Tibetan nomad experience. Rich, thick descriptions allow readers to feel, smell, and visualize pastoral lifestyles as well as better understand the multiplicities of Tibetan character. This extraordinary achievement suggests the possibility of reinventing ourselves without forfeiting the dignity and meaning of an ever-fading past.

Rinchen Khar (Rin chen mkhar རིན་ཆེན་མཁའ་པ་)
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Gu ru 'phrin las' vivid short stories illuminate nomadic A mdo Tibetan life. Growing up in a herding family, the author portrays the local community's religious beliefs, taboos, family conflicts, marriage, and social norms. This book's critical descriptions of ordinary moments in herders' daily life complicate the stereotype and romantization of Tibetan pastoral life.

Sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱལ་པལ་ཤིས།

...memorable tales of a past in a remote corner of the Tibet Plateau, highlighting mundane life's harsh realities, reflecting social norms, customs, beliefs, and the herding way of life. It is unusual for such a young author to have experienced living in a yak-hair tent - a lifestyle that has nearly vanished. Such unique lived experiences enable Gu ru 'phrin las to grasp and depict his grandmother's stories vividly and persuasively. Each story opens a window, revealing a hidden actuality in often sentimentalized nomad life. These nineteen stories allow outsiders to experience harsh realities as they travel through romance and realities.

Gengqiu Gelai (Konchok Gelek, Dkon mchog dge legs
དཀོན་མཆོག་དགེ་ལེགས།) *Universit of Zurich*

1

YOU ARE MY MOTHER'S MOTHER

Characters

Achoalo	a monk
Byangchub	Drako's son
Drakyi	Lhamo's herd-mate
Drako	Soko's brother
Drashinamgar	Lhamo's grandson
Drayang	Ganglha's friend
Gangdze	Gangkyi's mother
Gangkyi	Gangdze's son
Ganglha	Lhadzom's friend
Beldzom	Lhamo's mother
Lhadzom	Ganglha's friend
Lhamo	Drashinamgar's grandmother
Wangchuk	a singer
Soko	a community leader



breeze blew gently one summer morning under dull sunlight. Grandmother Lhamo seemed displeased with the weather. Her face had as many wrinkles and crevices as a piece of tightly crumpled paper that had been unwadded and laid out flat. Sitting near her family tent flap, she began her story as usual, picking up her chipped tea bowl decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols with the fingers of her dirt-encrusted right hand and scraping away a few bits of dried, dark *zamba* stuck to the bowl. Occasionally pausing to sip some milk tea, Lhamo normally exuded enthusiasm when storytelling to her grandson, Drashinamgar. He enjoyed her stories as much as she enjoyed telling them, but today was different. Grandmother had tears in her eyes as she talked.

Drashinamgar was so involved in the story that he didn't even blink until his grandmother stopped, two lines of tears wetting her cheeks. She piously tapped her prayer wheel against her forehead before putting it, wrapped in a red cloth, on her lap.

Drashinamgar was etching a yak on the lap of his grandmother's sheepskin robe. Its surface had been rubbed with butter many times and was thus a perfect drawing surface. A mischievous, obstinate, six-year-old, he sometimes sucked and licked mucus from his nose when he was angry with his mother.



Grandmother Lhamo adjusted the upper part of the sheepskin robe on her left shoulder and again touched the prayer wheel to her forehead piously as she slowly closed her eyes. She placed the prayer wheel in her robe pouch and paused. Great sadness was written on her face, testifying to the more than seventy years of life she had experienced. Drashinamgar scratched at a louse in his short, messy hair and curiously stared at his grandmother's face, eager to know what would happen next. He impatiently demanded, "Grandmother, who was the *dremo* 'witch'? Why did people believe she was a witch?"

"You'll be frightened if I tell you the truth," Grandmother replied gently.

...

The Galung Tribe camped near the Yellow River. It was a wonderful place in summer, and the locals found great pleasure in the beautiful scenery. Herders enjoyed singing and listening to melodious herding songs, while also delighting in the lovely sound of lambs bleating as they leaped over small glistening creeks, frolicking here and there, excited by brief sprinkles of rain. On the emerald grassland decorated with fragrant flowers, young herders chased the end of a rainbow to one side of the Yellow River. The other bank was a densely forested hill.

Every drizzly evening, locals also enjoyed the many birds that sang while perched on the green, vigorously leafing branches.

...

Winter was, however, another story of another world. No one said Galung was a perfect winter home. Feelings of desolation and loneliness were intensified by

AHP #65 རྒྱལ་ལམ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གུ་རུ་ཤའིན་ལམ། Gu ru 'phrin las
whirlwinds that periodically swept dust from yak enclosures, coloring the horizon red.

On a day that was both auspicious and destined for tragedy, Lhamo rose earlier than her mother, Beldzom, and milked all the yaks. Her mother loved her and never scolded her. Lhamo held a wooden milk bucket with her right hand and walked to her family's tent as briskly as the heavy bucket allowed. She was happy.

After kindling a fire in the adobe stove, she wiped her sweaty, unwashed forehead with her robe sleeve. Next, she poured hot water from an old kettle into a cracked red basin and added a dash of cold water.

Her mother started to get up as Lhamo was tidying her hair.

"Today must be auspicious since you are up so early!" she greeted.

"Dear Mother, you forgot! Today, my herdmate, Drakyi, will marry!" Lhamo exclaimed.

Beldzom yawned, paused, and offered, "Yes! You should join her wedding."

"I promised I would join her wedding party when we herded calves together. Look! The tea is boiling. Let's have breakfast now," Lhamo suggested.

Beldzom yawned in response.

"Dear Mother, please get up. I must leave soon after breakfast. Drakyi will be delighted if I'm the first guest who arrives at her wedding," Lhamo gently persuaded.

"OK. I'll get up right now," Beldzom agreed but stayed in bed a while longer before kicking away the robes that served as her bed covers, one by one.

Beldzom took a wooden box from a pile of supplies and gear after the meal. The box was white, but it was wrapped in a dry yak-skin with black hair attached. Beldzom unwrapped a coarse yak-hair rope from around the box. The rope secured the box lid, preventing mice from getting inside. Lhamo stood next to her mother, eager for something inside. She snatched a black robe from the box before her mother had completely removed the lid, raced outside, jerked off the robe she had on, and pulled on the black robe. Of her three robes, this was her favorite and her only unpatched piece of clothing. She wore it when she attended parties.

Clad in the robe, she stood near her family tent's flap, put her right hand to her forehead, and inspected the sky with sparkling, inquisitive eyes. Eager to learn what the weather would be, sunshine lit up her cheeks, so that they resembled coral.

Lhamo never asked her mother to buy ornaments for her. The black robe satisfied her.

As Beldzom drove her family's twenty yaks to the mountains, Lhamo mounted a riding yak and set off, soon catching sight of her peers who were waiting for her. She sped up when they shouted at her. They loved her because of her beauty and compassion and never humiliated or denigrated her because of her poverty.

Lhadzom, clad in a spotless white, sheepskin robe, urged, " Lhamo! Make your yak go faster, or we'll be too late and miss part of the wedding."

Ganglha, clad in a robe trimmed with otter pelts, laughed loudly and said, "Hey everybody! Lhadzom is in such a hurry. Maybe someone is waiting for her? Let's see her handsome boyfriend! How wonderful!"

"It's more interesting if we can see your boyfriend!" Drayang retorted, adjusting her fox skin hat.

"She'll surely become a nun. She has no boyfriend and will join a nunnery by the end of next year. Just look at her short hair! It's already cut in a nun's style," Lhadzom pronounced, rearranging her shiny long hair, so it flowed between her generous breasts.

"Hey, dear friends! Do you prefer Lhadzom' bald boyfriend or a round piece of *rtsam pa*? Her boyfriend was a monk for a year, so only Lhadzom is willing to be his girlfriend," Drayang proclaimed authoritatively and laughed so loudly that she almost toppled off her horse.

Lhamo said little but enjoyed her friends' banter.

...

Wangchuk was singing from the center of a huge, black yak-hair tent. A white *kha btags* hung from his right hand while he held a bowl brimming with yak milk in his left hand. Everyone enjoyed gazing at his attractive physique and listening to his pleasant voice. He was considered the most handsome young man in his community.

As Lhamo and her friends entered the tent, Lhamo nervously blushed, her cheeks turning as red as shiny autumn apples. It was the first time for many of the people there to see her. Everyone focused on Lhamo's arrival, ignoring Wangchuk. Dressed in her black robe, Lhamo, the new center of attention, self-consciously put her head down and sat by Ganglha near the tent entrance. Her nervousness meant she had forgotten to look for her boyfriend.

Wangchuk plopped next to his close friend, Drashi, picked up a bowl, and sipped a bit of milk tea. He set the bowl down and stroked his long black hair with his right hand. His silver finger-ring, inset with three red corals, trapped a few strands of hair. Lhamo watched as he pulled the hair from his ring. Noticing Lhamo was watching, he roughly jerked at his hair.

In his thick red sash, Drashi wore a long sword in a silver sheath decorated with coral. Wangchuk's hand struck the hilt of Drashi's sword. Surprised by a jolt of pain, he scolded Drashi.

At sunset, as most guests started back to their homes, Drashi and his friends huddled near the bank of the Yellow River, talking about girls and night dating. Drashi ran to Wangchuk and whispered in his ear. A second later, Wangchuk angrily burst out, "Tell Gangkyi to come here and meet me now. Quickly!"

Drashi nodded agreement and respectfully exclaimed, "Yes!"

...

Wangchuk and Gangkyi were standing among rocks by the river. Rage burned in Wangchuk's heart as he accused, "How dare you date Lhamo. You're ugly! Do you

think you can attract her by pretending to be a good person? Stupid! Don't you know beautiful girls like handsome guys like me?"

Gangkyi ignored this outburst. Enraged, Wangchuk slapped Gang skyabs' face and threatened, "Do you understand? Lhamo is my lover and will be my wife. Don't dare meet her again or you'll lose your life. Understand?"

Gangkyi was furious but quietly endured the slap.

"Are you deaf?" Wangchuk bellowed and slapped him again.

Gangkyi suddenly bent down, picked up a rock, and smashed it against Wangchuk's head. Wangchuk crumpled among the rocks, blood spurting from his head. He lay corpse-like as a tiny rivulet of blood flowed into the Yellow River, creating a red cloud that soon vanished into the larger stream.

...

Drako sat cross-legged, wearing an angry expression. He and his brother, the community leader, Soko, were having a private conversation near Soko's tent. Taking a deep breath, Drako began, "My son, Wangchuk, almost died last night from a head injury..."

Soko interrupted, "Don't worry Brother. I'll deal with it. We'll get a big settlement from Gangkyi's family."

Drako blurted, "They're rich! Property means nothing to them. I want Gangkyi dead."

Soko looked at his brother's angry face and was silent for a bit before cautioning, "Bloody conflict will ensue if you take revenge. You know I'm the community leader. I'll take responsibility for this event. I'll handle it peacefully."

Drako seemed to nod in agreement and added, "It's good if Tshegrags feels what it's like for his son to suffer serious injury."

Soko continued persuading Drako, who finally agreed to wait for his report a few days later.

...

Tshegrags warmly greeted Soko in his family tent and seated him on a thick, smooth wool mat. A platter piled with steaming mutton was set in front of him. Soko and Tshegrags each took a piece of mutton and sipped milk tea. Soko began in a friendly way, "My dear sworn brother, don't worry about Drako's son, Wangchuk. It was a small injury. It's not serious."

Tshegrags knew that his friend's purpose was to reassure him, and reluctantly said, "OK, Brother."

"It's best for your son, Gangkyi, to apologize to Wangchuk. Otherwise, we won't extinguish the fire of Drako's anger."

"Is it appropriate for me to give some compensation?" Tshegrags asked.

"That's unnecessary. I told you, my sworn brother, that I saw Wangchuk's wound, and it's just a scratch."

Tshegrags agreed as they moved on to chat about this and that.

•••

Drako's oldest son, Byangchub, was chanting scriptures near Wangchuk, who lay sprawled on a bed with a bandaged head. Drako entered the family tent and leaned his rifle against a bag of grain in the lower part of the tent. He took a couple of swallows of tea from a bowl and said nothing.

Some minutes later, Byangchub finished chanting and wrapped the scripture in a yellow cloth. He understood that Gangkyi never bullied others and urged his father not to take revenge.

Drako knelt by his son and asked, "Dear son, how are you today?"

Wangchuk stared vacantly, giving no response. Drako thought he had spoken too quietly and loudly said, "My son, how are you today?"

Receiving no reply, Drako took a deep breath and stood up. He realized his son's mind had vanished.

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The next day, Soko again visited Tshe grags' tent, regret and shame etched on his face. He tried to say something to Tshe grags, but nothing comprehensible emerged from his mouth.

Tshegrags poured steaming milk tea into a bowl. Soko sipped it and eventually said, "I'm sorry. You should give ten yaks to Wangchuk's family. He's now just like a corpse."

Tshegrags was stupefied, not because Wangchuk was in a coma, but at the thought of losing ten yaks. He scratched his unkempt hair and said incredulously, "Ten yaks? Because of that fight over Lhamo?!"

•••

Ten days later, Gangkyi heard that Lhamo's family had been exiled from the community. He refused to speak. His mother, Gangdze, urged him to eat, but he refused.

Tshegrags glared at Gangkyi and scolded, "Shameless! Only a fool would be attracted to a poor girl. You know our family is wealthy. How shameful if you fell in love with a girl from a poor family."

"Father, why should Lhamo's family give ten yaks to Wangchuk's family? Lhamo didn't hit Wangchuk's head. I did. Our family should take responsibility for the yaks that Drako requested. It's not fair for Lhamo's family to lose ten yaks," Gangkyi entreated.

"Shut your dirty mouth!" Tshegrags bellowed.

"Father, have mercy on Lhamo's family. They only have twenty yaks!" Gangkyi pleaded.

"Her mother grabbed our community leader, Soko, by the hair as they argued over the ten yaks. Stupid! Witch! Who'll have mercy on Beldzom? Do you understand what I'm saying? Just shut up!" Tshegrags declared.

•••

Lhamo grudgingly helped her mother pack the family's few belongings. Understanding that the conniving community leader and the cruel Drako were bullying her family, she sadly urged her mother not to move and not pay any yaks.

Beldzom comforted, "Dear baby! Don't cry. We'll start a happy, peaceful life in your Aunt Yangmu's community."

Distraught at leaving her friends and lover, Lhamo knelt near a bag of grain and sobbed.

•••

Three years later, Lhamo seemed to be reconciled to living in the Galung Tribe with her mother. Nevertheless, she frequently recalled her happy moments with Gangkyi in the Galung Tribe. Her pillow was often wet with tears, something her mother either ignored or did not know.

Noticing Lhamo's swollen cheeks, her mother urged her to eat more and curiously wondered why Lhamo hadn't fallen in love with any of the many men who pursued her. Even Achoalo's son, Thar 'bum, had pursued her.

•••

Having finished his daily chanting Achoalo put his wooden bowl into his dirty, bedraggled monk-robe's pouch. After a moment's contemplation, he pulled a jacket over his robe. His wife knew he would visit the home of Tshe brtan, the richest family in their community.

Tseden warmly welcomed Achoalo, who had chanted scriptures for them after his wife had given birth to their three daughters. Tshe brtan's fourth child was a boy. Consequently, Tseden treated Achoalo like a holy lama and was not bothered that he had a wife and children. All the local community members respected and followed Achoalo's suggestions.

•••

One sunny morning Lhamo drove a calf to her tent and passed Achoalo, who was peeing near his tent. When he noticed Lhamo, he pretended he was doing nothing out of the ordinary and greeted, "Hey Lhamo, how's your mother?" in a friendly way.

"My mother is good," Lhamo murmured.

"Visit my home when you are free," Achoalo invited.

Lhamo blushed, feeling guilty that she had refused to listen to both her mother and Achoalo and had rejected Achoalo's son's offer of marriage.

•••

Beldzom and Lhamo tied all their yaks. Realizing that her family's sick calf was absent, Lhamo mounted her riding yak and headed into a narrow, forested valley. Her riding yak's moist, pink tongue hung out, almost touching the zigzag path. It was a dim evening, and dark clouds swirled above. Unable to see very far into the distance, she mooed like a mother yak. She went near a huge, dark cave and saw the missing calf dozing at the cave entrance. The calf woke in terror at the sound of Lhamo dismounting nearby and scampered into the cave. Lhamo followed and was

astonished at seeing a fire. For a moment, she trembled in fear, unable to move. She eventually managed to back away but then stepped on someone's foot.

It was Gangkyi! Lhamo could not accept he was a human being until he touched her right cheek. Gangkyi's skin was rough and dark, but his handsome, attractive appearance remained.

"Lhamo! We must thank the Buddha for reuniting us. I will never leave you until I die. Lhamo! Maybe you think I'm mad. I left my family three years ago and became a hunter. I argued with my father after he arranged a marriage for me. I swore I would never marry anyone but you. I got here a couple of days ago, but I never imagined we would meet so soon."

Lhamo silently lowered her head and dabbed at her tears. Gangkyi took her in his arms and wiped away her tears with his right hand.

Some days later, herders drove their yaks back home. Tarbum dismounted from his yak near his family's tent and entered to find his father chanting. He blurted, "I saw a ghost. A living ghost!"

"Where did you see a ghost?" Achoalo inquired.

"It entered a cave in Srib nag Valley," Tarbum answered, his face pale. "It was tall and wearing a large animal skin. Its hair was as long as a woman's. Maybe the ghost is a female. I didn't see its face."

Achoalo doubted this report and resumed chanting. The community, however, was frightened by Thar 'bum's report and the ghost was the only topic of discussion among local community members the next day.

Yangmu was sixty and lived alone. She tied ten yaks and went to Beldzom's home to ask Lhamo to help find her three missing yaks. Beldzom was afraid the ghost would harm her daughter, but Lhamo persuaded her mother to allow her to go. She sincerely wanted to help Aunt Yangmu, knowing no one else would.

On this very dark night, they searched everywhere they could imagine until they grew tired. Yangmu suggested they return home and then suddenly tumbled to the ground. Her yak had bolted when a rabbit sprang in front of them. Lhamo quickly dismounted, tied her riding yak to a bush, and chased after and caught Yangmu's yak.

"Are you OK, Aunt Yangmu?" Lhamo worried.

"I'm fine. Don't worry. Where's my yak?" Yangmu whispered hoarsely.

Lhamo patted Yangmu's back until she breathed normally. She helped Yangmu remount her yak, and they rode back home together.

The next morning, Lhamo got up earlier than usual and hurried to Yangmu's tent. Lhamo worried when she found her aunt lying in bed with a pale, gaunt face. Not knowing what to do, she asked Achoalo for help. Achoalo chanted for the whole day and performed various rituals. Nevertheless, Yangmu became increasingly ill and passed away that night.

...

Achoalo pondered possible explanations for Yangmu's death. Suddenly, a smile lit up his dark face as he recalled the ghost story.

Locals believed evil had possessed Yangmu, which explained her death. They also believed Achoalo's account of a ghost that was so violent and powerful that he could not defeat it. From that day on, locals began to have negative opinions of Lhamo.

Over time, Lhamo's robes became worn and in need of patching. Wearing her favorite black robe, she drove her family's few yaks to Srib nag Valley, passing by the community. Lhamo was no longer the famous beauty that attracted everyone's attention. On the contrary, some local girls avoided her as vicious rumors circulated. Some didn't even use her real name. A new name, Ma ne, became Lhamo's nickname. Rumor said evil possessed Lhamo, which explained why, at times, she was not in her tent when young men visited her at night.

Locals thought a ghost would possess them if they used her real name whereas using "Ma ne," which they believed symbolized the Six Sacred Syllables, would protect them from evil.

Gangkyi sat near a creek, plucked a red flower, and hesitantly offered it to Lhamo. She raised her head a little and took it.

Gangkyi blushed, wanting to speak, but nervously remained silent. Lhamo lowered her head again as she twisted and tore the red blossom into bits.

Eventually, Gangkyi haltingly said, "Lhamo, let's marry and live as we like."

Lhamo gazed at her swollen belly as tears drenched her strawberry-colored cheeks. She murmured something that Gangkyi did not understand.

"Why are you crying? There's no reason for despair. Do you no longer love me? Do you have another boyfriend?" Gangkyi inquired despondently.

"You are my only lover. I'm eager to marry you, but we can't change our destiny. I don't want both our lives to be miserable. You can have a happy life if you leave this hellish place. I want my lover to live somewhere as peaceful as paradise," Lhamo managed in a trembling voice.

"Lhamo, I prefer to live a tragic life with you rather than live in Heaven without you! Please! Marry me. We can create a happy life. Lhamo, I love you! My life is finished if you reject my sincere request!" Gangkyi declared, facing the sky.

"I am no longer Lhamo. No one in my community calls me that," she said, leaning against Gangkyi. "Locals say I am an evil witch," she added in a whisper.

"Oh, my Buddha! You are not a witch. You are Lhamo, my lover! You will be a kind-hearted mother soon," Gangkyi said, gazing at Lhamo's belly.

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Lhamo's only child, Tshe tshe, was also Drashinamgar's mother. She was eavesdropping, eager to learn more about her father. Unfortunately, Drashinamgar suddenly interrupted his grandmother's story by standing up and declaring, "Gangkyi was right. You are Lhamo! You are not a witch. You are my mother's mother, Lhamo! You are not a witch!" Drashinamgar continued.

Grandmother Lhamo was astonished and did not answer, but a big smile on her face signaled that the rest of her life would be a bright departure from the past decades.

It rained the next morning. A steady drizzle refreshed all creation and energized the damp grassland that grew more vigorously, becoming even more vibrantly green. An aromatic breeze made the countless flowers sway, sending showers of pearly droplets of water earthward under the flowers.

Drashinamgar and Drashi yang zom were naked and ran happily toward a small brook decorated with nameless flowers.

The grandmother put her left hand to her forehead as her right hand gripped her red prayer wheel. She smiled when she saw her grandson with his lovely playmate, Dra shi yang zom.

2

"I'M SUCH A HORRIBLE PERSON!"

Characters

Lhamo	Tsering's cousin
Tsebe	Tseringdr's friend
Tsering	Tsekyi's husband
Tseringdrashi	Tsekyi and Tsering's son



Tsering returned home after visiting the local monastery where a lama had bestowed the auspicious name, Tseringdrashi, on his first child, pleasing Tsering and his wife, Tsekyi.

Tsering began chanting scriptures every morning and before going to bed from the day his son was born. He often reminded his wife to light a butter lamp every night. After lighting the lamp, Tsekyi piously put her palms together, touched her forehead, and prayed.

One morning, Tsering had a horrible fever. His fleshy cheeks were pale, and his lips were cracked. Tsekyi suggested that she herd while he rested at home. While he knew that his illness would worsen if he herded, Tsering put great value on his family's reputation, which would be seriously damaged if a wife herded while her husband was at home. Consequently, Tsering mounted a red yak with one broken horn and got ready to take his yaks to the mountains.

The yak suddenly bolted. Tsering's foxskin hat fell to the ground, which he snatched up without dismounting. He stuffed it into his robe pouch and drove his family's yaks to the grassland.

When Tsering returned home with the livestock in the late evening, he noticed that his wife wore an expression of despair and reported that their three-month-old baby had cried for most of the day. He would sleep but awake in terror a moment later.

Tsering motionlessly stared at his wife and gazed at his son, who was wrapped in soft lambskin, inside a sheepskin robe. He thought someone had frightened him and recalled that his cousin, Lhamo, had spent the previous night in his tent.

...

It was a pitch-black night when Lhamo found herself near Tsering's tent. She was very upset to have spent the whole day unsuccessfully searching for her missing yaks. Tired, hungry, and sure she could not safely arrive home that night, she decided to spend the night at the tent of her cousin, Tsering. She hesitated, but eventually called

to Tsekyi, igniting the watchdogs' ferocious, insane barking. Scared of the dogs, Lhamo dismounted from her riding yak and waited.

Alerted by the dogs' mad barking, Tsekyi came out of the tent with a flashlight, heard someone quietly calling her name, and noticed a yak near the livestock enclosure. Approaching the yak, she was frightened by a messy-haired, pale-faced woman. Realizing she was her husband's cousin, Tsekyi was embarrassed and pretended not to be startled. When she invited Lhamo to come into the tent, she said, "Bring me a sheepskin and a mat. I'll sleep in the yak enclosure. I'm not afraid to sleep there."

Tsekyi replied, "Foolish! We are one family! You spending a night at your cousin's home is fine."

"Grandmother said that a woman who visits a family at night brings bad luck. I also heard you gave birth a couple of months ago," Lhamo countered.

"We are relatives. It's fine if you spend a night at your cousin's home. You'll freeze in the yak enclosure," Tsekyi persuaded.

Lhamo reluctantly nodded agreement, silently prayed to the local lama, and murmured scriptures as she entered the tent.

Certain that his son had been terrified, Tsering melted a piece of lead in a metal scoop, told Tsekyi to hold another scoop half-filled with water over their son's head, and poured the molten lead into the scoop. The lead immediately solidified into a shape that Tsering interpreted as resembling that of a woman. His grandmother had told him this method produced an image of what had frightened an ill child, and if the child wore this lead image on a string around its neck, it would recover.

Deducing that Lhamo had frightened his son, Tsekyi put the image into a small bag and sewed it on the back of Tseringdrashi's cradle.

The next morning, Tseringdrashi was still crying loudly. Tsering worriedly decided to take Tseringdrashi to see the local lama. He gently put Tseringdrashi inside his robe pouch and mounted a calm white mare. On the way, he stopped at the tent of his friend, Tsebe.

A doctor was visiting Tsebe and had brought his medical kit with him, which always impressed others since he was the only doctor in the community. The doctor felt the baby's hands, inspected his ears and tongue, and said, "Tsering, your son has a cold. Give him this medicine. It's not serious," and handed him some powdered herbs wrapped in paper. An odor of medicine filled the air. "Don't worry. He'll be fine after taking medicine," assured the doctor.

"Thank you!" Tsering said and kissed his son, inside his robe pouch.

"Wait! Wait a moment! You also need to take some medicine for your cough. Your illness caused this baby's cold," the doctor said and handed Tsering more medicine.

Some days later, Lhamo again lost several of her yaks. She searched for hours but did not find them. Dark clouds moved in the sky as Lhamo descended a towering

mountain. Deciding not to go home, but to continue searching the next day, she headed to Tsering's home. After dismounting near the yak enclosure, she called to Tsekyi. The dogs barked furiously, but nobody emerged from the tent. She also noticed that the light in the tent went out. She squatted in the corner of the yak enclosure. Tears wetted her cheeks and plopped onto her lap, quickly becoming ice. She prayed for someone to show mercy as her thin body shivered.

The next morning, pure white snow covered everything. Tsering got up, started a fire in the adobe stove, looked at his son, kissed him, and smiled. Tsering went out to pee and noticed his wife collecting yak dung in the yak enclosure. Suddenly she stood rigidly, seemingly unable to move. She had just stumbled on a frozen corpse in the yak enclosure. After a few moments, she recovered enough to rush to her husband.

Tsekyi's face was pale, and it was hard for her to speak. Finally, she managed, "Lhamo's dead. She's in the yak enclosure. You wouldn't ... when the dogs barked last night. I said Lhamo was calling, but you ... "




Tsering's face flushed as he gazed at his wife as she raced to a neighbor's tent. Tsering sighed heavily, slowly walked to the yak enclosure, squatted near the corpse, pondered, and finally muttered, "I'm such a horrible person! My sister's daughter. I

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don't know ... I didn't let my wife go outside and bring you in last night. What's wrong
with me?"

3

ADMIRATION

t was an auspicious Tibetan New Year's Day, but it was also a depressing day for a little, six-year-old girl with a plump face wrapped in a red scarf. Snow brightened an endless grassland and spectacular mountains. Women clad in greasy, time-worn sheepskin robes wore big smiles between reddish cheeks. They greeted one another while fetching water at daybreak and soon had wooden buckets full of fresh water on their backs. They predicted that the New Year would be propitious, trusting the phrase that decreed snow on the first day of the New Year was a very favorable portent. The truth of this bit of folk wisdom that had been passed down over many generations was never questioned. Children joyfully played outside rather than wash their faces and change their clothes. In fact, their only clothes were sheepskin robes and yak-hide boots.

Children peeped into a rich family's tent. The wind brought dust into the tent where a metal basin of fried bread and another metal basin of boiled beef sat on the right side. The appetizing odor wafting off the meat made the children salivate and feel hungry. They all hoped their parents would call them soon for lunch.

A six-year boy wearing a foxskin hat realized the red-scarfed girl was not playing with them. She was still sleeping. Her father was fond of her and, because of this, her older brother was jealous and hated her, but he also admired her. He had to get up early every morning and drive his family's yaks to grassy mountains and often imagined, "I would be the happiest child if I were her!"

The red-scarfed girl's grandmother lit a butter lamp and woke the girl. All the family members enjoyed a delicious meal while chatting loudly. It seemed it was the happiest day for them, even if they shared only one basin of fried bread. But the red-scarfed girl had little appetite.

After lunch, the parents and children visited their neighbors and relatives. The red-scarfed girl sat on her grandmother's lap; sadness etched on her adorable plump face. Her grandmother wondered about the little girl and asked, "What happened? You should be happy. It's New Year's Day! Don't be sad!"

"All the other children got up early this morning, removed their grass-insoles from their shoes, threw the old insoles away, and put dry grass in their boots. They chanted the Six Sacred Syllables and spit where they threw their old insoles," explained the little girl.

"Don't worry. You can do the same on the next New Year's Day," her grandmother consoled.

"Grandmother, is it true if I change my insoles in the early morning of the New Year, chant the Six Sacred Syllables, and spit where I throw away the old insoles, my soul can drink the spit when it thirsts and the power of Six Sacred Syllables will lighten my soul's pain after I die?" asked the child.

"Yes, it's true. When I was a child like you, my father's mother told me the same story," the grandmother replied.

"I'm scared my soul will suffer thirst and I will be tortured if I die this year," said the little girl.

"My child, don't be silly! You will live forever because you are my dearest granddaughter," the old woman reassured.

At night, the little girl's two brothers sat on their grandfather's lap on the right side of the tent. One perched on each of their grandfather's knees, listening to his stories and folktales. The brothers pleaded for more stories. Seeing the boy's smiles, he happily told more stories to make them happier on this special day. Light from a butter lamp flickered in the tent. Under this dim light, the red-scarfed girl stared at her brothers for a while and noticed their boots. She put her head gently on her grandmother's lap, admiring her brothers. They had changed their insoles that morning and were now enjoying stories.

The grandmother, realizing she was still unhappy, stroked her head and asked, "My dearest, shall we go to bed?" knowing she could do nothing to make her happy.

The little girl did not reply.

An hour later, the little girl was in bed with her grandmother, her head on a shared pillow. Her grandmother embraced and kissed her. The little girl watched her two brothers admiringly as they continued to enjoy their grandfather's stories. Sometimes they laughed loudly and tumbled on the ground. The little girl tried to smile as her brothers rolled about on the ground, but she could not.

Finally, she slept.

4

AN ICED YELLOW LEAF

Characters

Tselo
the grandmother
the step-grandfather

the grandmother's grandchild
Tselo's grandmother
the grandmother's husband



crooked path led to a small wood, where yellow leaves were scattered at the base of the trees, crumbled into haphazard bits and pieces by the trampling of livestock. Whirlwinds propelled leaves and fragments into the air and across the surface of the ground where they danced energetically. Tselo stared motionlessly into the wood, a mild breeze blowing through his short hair. A lock of raggedly cut hair blurred his vision, but he did not react. He stood, motionlessly, at one end of the path.

One freezing morning, Tselo woke from a dream in which he had felt exhausted and slept while herding his family's yaks on a spectacular mountain. Somehow, he had plunged off a cliff and had awakened just in time. He woke up, wiped perspiration from his forehead, rubbed his eyes, and got out of bed. He wondered why his mother had not prepared breakfast and placed it by his pillow. Before she woke him, she always put a bowl of milk tea and a piece of *zamba* by his pillow. He went out of the tent to pee and did not see his mother, so he walked to his family's yak enclosure where his step-grandfather, who was in his late fifties, was brutally beating a female yak to death with a big block of wood. Unable to watch this, Tselo covered his eyes with his hands and rushed back to the tent as his step-grandfather glared at him.

The grandmother lit a butter lamp and prayed piously, her palms together and pressed against her forehead. Tears trickled down her wrinkled cheeks as Tselo stared at her from the tent entrance. Troubled by what he had just witnessed, and his mother's disappearance, he put his head on his grandmother's lap and silently thought as she stroked his head. He was hoping and waiting for her to explain the morning's unusualness.

The grandmother wiped away her tears when she heard Tselo snoring, picked him up in her arms, and carefully put him in his bed. Afraid of waking him, she gently covered him with his sheepskin robe, knelt next to him, and began chanting scriptures, holding a string of prayer beads in her left hand and a prayer

wheel in the right. She chanted for a while and then dozed. The prayer wheel fell to the ground and rolled into some ash. Waking, she picked it up, put it on top of her head to atone for the sin of not keeping the prayer wheel in a clean, holy place, and resumed chanting scriptures while glancing at her grandson, who was now snoring loudly, tears trickling from his eyes as he slept.

Several months passed. Tselo played with the calf whose mother the boy's step-grandfather had beaten to death. After Tselo's mother died, few children wanted to play with him, so the calf became his best friend and playmate. Tselo made sure the calf grazed and drank water near his family tent. He did not allow the calf to graze with the other yaks, fearing wolves would kill it.

Every late evening, he secretly dipped milk into a bent metal scoop from his grandmother's wooden bucket, added salt and warm tea, and fed it to the calf that rushed over when he appeared in the yak enclosure holding the red scoop in his hand.

One day, Tselo's step-grandfather saw Tselo feeding the orphan calf with milk and realized stray dogs had not stolen the missing milk. A bit later, a local doctor visited Tselo's grandmother, examined her, and suggested she eat nutritious food such as milk, butter, and meat. Tselo was sure it was impossible to provide his grandmother with meat every day. Besides, his step-grandfather was pious and would never kill the family's three sacred yaks, nor would he kill their two female yaks. To do so would mean no calves.

It was hard to get butter in winter, but easier to obtain milk. The step-grandfather had milked after the grandmother had become seriously ill. Tselo wondered if he should feed the calf with milk tea or leave the milk for his grandmother. He puzzled about this for some days. He dared not ask his step-grandfather, who he feared, not because he often beat him, but because he never smiled. Also, his step-grandfather had warned him not to steal milk again, or he would beat him severely.

One evening Tselo went to the yak enclosure. The calf ran over, sniffed him, and licked his hands. Feeling sympathy and pity, he went back to the tent and got a dipper of milk. At the entrance of the yak enclosure, he met his step-grandfather who slapped him without a word.

The scoop of milk splashed on the ground.

The grandfather slapped him again and said, "Stupid boy! Feeding your enemy! Fool! Don't you know how your mother died? When I reached the yak enclosure, she was dying. That orphan calf's mother gored her in the belly. You don't love your grandmother! Instead, you love that enemy orphan calf. Fool!"

Tselo was eight and puzzled by the word "enemy." He said nothing and rushed to the small wood near the tent.

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Snow encased in ice covered the trees. No creature made a sound. The only sound was the wind's whispers. Tselo's gaze was fixed on a decayed yellow leaf clutched to the earth, swathed in a transparent piece of ice.



5

BUILDING A TEMPLE



little six-year-old boy was so attached to his grandmother that he would sleep with nobody else. She got up early and recited mantras in front of a Buddha image in the right, upper part of the tent. Later, she lit a butter lamp and gazed at her grandchild, who still slept in their bed.

Willow branches had been cut by her son, the boy's father, who spread the branches on the ground in the lower part of the left side of the tent, and covered them with a sheepskin mat. The father was proud he had made a comfortable bed for his mother, who was in her seventies.

The grandmother woke the boy after she had readied breakfast. The little boy rolled back and forth in the bed once his grandmother woke him. She knew she spoiled the boy, who had become very stubborn. It was hard to persuade him to do something if he didn't want to. She placed a bowl of milk with thick cream on the surface near his pillow and handed him a ball of *zamba*.

The little boy soon finished drinking the milk but didn't eat the *zamba*, whining that his grandmother had not washed her hands. The *zamba* was dirty, he declared. His grandmother smiled, kissed his forehead, and ate the *zamba*.

The little boy did not intend to get up, but he had to urinate, so he threw off his grandmother's sheepskin robe he had used as a blanket and ran outside naked. The grandmother watched the boy as he ran out of the tent. She smiled, noticing he was growing.

The little boy rubbed his eyes and yawned as he urinated. He heard and saw his parents and neighbors separating his family yaks into two groups. His father and two young men were mounted on horses and chased some yaks, which ran to another herd. The boy loudly laughed when he saw one young man tumble off his horse while chasing the boy's favorite yak, a red, polled male. The little boy watched until his mother came home and his father and the young men drove a herd of yaks in the direction of the local monastery.

The grandmother sat near the tent door, enjoying the sunshine. The boy plopped in his grandmother's lap and demanded, "Dear Grandmother! Is Father going to sell all the yaks? Father won't sell all eighty yaks to the butchers, right? He promised he wouldn't sell my favorite yak to the slaughterers."

His grandmother murmured, put her palms together, touched her forehead, paused, and replied, "Our family will accumulate merit by donating yaks to the local monastery. The lama will build a huge new temple."

The little boy lightly punched his grandmother and said, "I hate Father! He is a bad man. He doesn't love me! He will give my beloved yak to others. From now on, I'm not going to love Father!"

His grandmother chuckled and said, "Don't worry! Yaks that sacrifice themselves to build a temple go to Heaven after they die. Whatever they want immediately appears in front of them the instant they want it. They can play all the time and swim in fresh water under beautiful trees where birds are singing. They joyfully live there and never suffer."

The little boy had never heard about Heaven. He was curious, but just as he was going to ask his grandmother about it, a playmate called. He was riding a stick, pretending it was a horse near his family tent. The little boy suddenly remembered that they had agreed on a horserace competition. He ran into his own family's tent, grabbed a stick, and rushed to his friend.

They raced many times but were unsure who was the winner. During the first race, the little boy was faster than his playmate, but the second time, his playmate was much faster. They did not agree on the final victor and continued racing until they got thirsty. They ran to a nearby creek, lay on the ground, and gulped fresh water without pausing or raising their heads. Once their thirst was quenched, they lay on their backs and looked up into the sky. After some minutes, the little boy realized his friend was sleeping.

Not bothering his friend, he kept looking into the sky, imagining that one day he would be in Heaven with his beloved yak, where they would enjoy their lives for all eternity. He would pick beautiful flowers and decorate his cherished yak in Heaven. He would ride the yak and sing herding songs, which would attract many little angels. He would play hide-and-seek with the angels, and if they lost, he would kiss their red cheeks. The little boy's favorite fruit was apples, and he imagined he would eat apples with the angels and his beloved yak when they got tired. He suddenly paused and asked himself, "How can I get to Heaven? When will I be there?"

He stood and raced home to find his grandmother was absent, so he asked his mother, "Dear Mother! How can people go to Heaven?"

His mother stared at him for a moment and said, "After they die."

Her son said, "Is Heaven real? Where is it?"

His mother did not know the answers, so she did not reply.

The little boy waited and offered, "Dear Mother, I want to die and go to Heaven."

His mother thought this was ominous, swatted his buttocks, and warned, "I'll beat you more seriously if I hear you say you want to die again."

The little boy sobbed and waited for his grandmother to return. He wanted to ask her if Heaven was real, but thought she would also beat him if he asked.

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After a while, the mother noticed her son was lying silently on the bed. She hoped he was no longer thinking about Heaven.




6

DILEMMA

Characters

Dorje	Tsomo's fiancé
Lhamo	Tsomo's mother
Tsomo	Lhamo's daughter

somo struggled with ambivalent thoughts. A beautiful young girl with a good family background rarely fled from her home to become a nun. Pious herdswomen never wished to become nuns. While widows and notorious women became nuns, few did so from earnest belief. Tsomo was puzzled. Should she leave her mother?

Tsomo closely watched a calf thrust its tail into the air, romp to its mother, and ferociously nurse as the mother licked its rear. Tears streamed down Tsomo's ruddy cheeks as she recalled beautiful memories of her mother, Lhamo, who loved her, an only child. Lhamo didn't ask Tsomo to herd until she was twenty, worried she would be unhappy. Tsomo often played with her peers and sometimes forgot to prepare food until her mother returned home. Lhamo never complained, even if Tsomo had not made a fire in their adobe stove when she drove their yaks back home on frigid snowy days.

Tsomo's attractive appearance attracted many local boys. She rejected countless offers of engagement. Her stubborn, multiple refusals disappointed her mother, so she stopped persuading her to marry. A handsome local man, Dorje, lived in Tsomo's home as Tsomo's fiancé. He was ten years older than Tsomo and pitied Tsomo, whose father had been killed in tribal conflict over grassland when she was an infant. Some months later, he fully understood Tsomo's childish behavior.


One day, Tsomo returned home with her family's livestock and dismounted from her horse. She was terribly thirsty and rushed inside the family tent to see her mother locked in an embrace as Dorje was about to kiss her.

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Tsomo stopped remembering. Dark thick clouds moved and thundered in from the horizon. Sure it would rain, she gazed at her home at the bottom of the mountain where she was herding livestock. She left, but her sling remained. Maybe she had forgotten it, maybe not.

7

HOMELESS, CRAZY MONK

fter his grandmother's death, Big Son began wandering. He no longer visited close family members and other relatives, nor did he go to his monastery and join classes. He even refused those asking for his help in conducting death rituals.

He was not dirty, he washed his face and feet in streams in summer, but his cassock was faded and worn. He put big leaves on his head for protection when the summer sun was scorching hot. His few belongings included a shabby yellow cloth and a single-strap shoulder bag that contained a Buddhist scripture, which he carefully read paragraph by paragraph. He contemplated for a long time after finishing each paragraph.

He went everywhere on foot. No horses, yaks, cars, or motorcycle for him. He was known as a homeless, crazy monk.

A year passed, and no one knew what had happened to him. His relatives worried, except for his younger brother.

"We must hold a death ritual for Big Son. He's been gone for a year, so he must be dead. I don't want to hear rumors about our family and see our family's reputation destroyed," said the father.

"We don't need to worry. Big Son is an omniscient monk and doesn't need our help. Furthermore, we can do nothing for him," Little Son said quietly and politely, his head lowered.

"Nonsense! He doesn't even understand he should come home to visit his family! He is a monk and should stay in the monastery and chant scriptures," said the father.

"He loves his family members and wants to visit, but he can't. He understands everything as he wanders and thus evades greedy samsara," said Little Son, as he slowly rolled and unrolled the red cloth edging of his robe's right sleeve while running his hand through his disheveled hair.

"He doesn't know he is foolish and crazy. How impossible for him to attain the knowledge required to evade samsara. What a foolish monk! He lets lice bite and drink his blood instead of killing them," the father said.

"He's not silly. He pities the lice. They feel hunger and pain as do other sentient beings. He is a true Buddhist who follows the Buddha's most essential teachings! He is very clever and understands what he should do and where he should live according to his understanding of samsara, rather than chanting scriptures with others surrounding him. He believes self-control is most important," said Little Son,

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glancing at his father while sticking out his tongue.

"You mean we are bad, ignorant people? Locals say he is crazy!" the father said, his face hot and flushed.

"It's easy to say a person is crazy, but it is really hard to know who is truly insane," said Little Son.

The father said nothing as he glared at Little Son, pondering for a while, murmuring incomprehensibly.

"He feels nothing because he understands everything and has everything. He lives peacefully as he wanders. He is happy," said Little Son, lifting his head and briefly glancing at his father.

The father was frozen by what Little Son had said. There was no more conversation.

Little Son recalled what his brother, had said before he had left a year ago. "When I feel nothing, I understand everything. ... When I feel nothing, I have everything. ... I am content."




8

HORSE HERDER

Characters

Badmo	Tsezang's grandmother
Belzang	Tsezang's neighbor
Donbe	Tsezang's herding- mate
Donlo	a great hunter
Jamlu	a local leader
Tsezang	Badmo's grandson
Zanglo	Tsezang's friend

sezang was dreaming, enjoying the celebration of Badmo's (his grandmother) eightieth year in the family's patched, black yak-hair tent. Tsezang gazed at a piece of beef. As he walked over to pick it up, his feet collided with his grandmother's sheepskin boots. He fell to the ground, and his nose began bleeding. He woke up, rubbed his nose, and was shocked at finding crusts of dried blood stuck to his upper lip and nostrils. He had been dreaming.

Tsezang got up early the next morning, made a fire in the adobe stove, and boiled tea in a kettle covered with soot. Once the kettle became noisy, he picked it up. He hated the noise of boiling tea.

Once he had dreamed of being with the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, who was from his community. Unfortunately, the sound of tea boiling woke him. He was afraid to meet that girl and tell her how much he loved her, but he often prayed for a lover before he went to bed, hoping he would meet her in the world of dreams.

He put *zamba* and a chunk of butter in his wooden bowl and added some hot tea. Unusually, this time he did not add dry cheese.

The grandmother was happy when she saw Tsezang having *zamba* with a lot of dried cheese. She liked to munch on dry cheese when she was bored. Tsezang had searched in his family's old *zamba* box several times, which convinced him there was no cheese in the box. Nevertheless, it was a wonderful, simple breakfast.

After breakfast, Tsezang took several horses to a lush, grass-covered mountain. His grandmother had asked him to be a horse-herder for the community. He knew that his payment would provide better conditions for his family, but he disliked the work. The local leaders faced great challenges when dealing with elders who eagerly tried to get jobs. Older adults lacked the strength to do hard work young people could do, but they wanted equal payment.

Tsezang dismounted, sat on a knoll, and enjoyed the view. On this cloudy, windy day, he pulled the upper part of his sheepskin robe up over the top of his head. As he warmed up, he wanted to sing but lacked the confidence to do so.

Once his herding-mate, Donbe, had heard him singing and told him he had a nice voice, and encouraged him to practice. Tsezang thought Donbe was teasing and blushed when he heard him tell other locals he had a good voice. Afterward, he carefully looked in every direction and sang quietly, even when he was high in the mountains.

On another mountain, some herders assembled, sang love songs, and laughed loudly. He realized that he was old enough to find a lover and marry. His grandmother was concerned about his marriage and urged him to marry the next year when he turned fifteen.

Boys were generally excited about their impending marriage and were eager to meet the spouses their parents had arranged for them. Some even saw their betrothed before marriage. In contrast, Tsezang had little interest in his future marriage. A bigger concern was celebrating his grandmother's eightieth birthday.

Tsezang was an introverted teenager with few friends. However, his loyal, sincere behavior had earned the locals' respect. They were willing to help him, which made it easier to ask others to help him prepare for the celebration, but he did not plead for help from anyone. He never forgot the Buddhist injunction, "*Rangnyiranggigonyin* 'You are your own master'," which his grandfather had told him as a dying injunction three years earlier.

Late in the evening, a man clad in a big sheepskin robe and riding a red horse crossed over a forested mountain. Rays from the dying sun colored the horse still redder. The man kicked mount's flanks and approached Tsezang.

The rider looked exactly like the mountain deity his grandmother had often described. Locals believed mountain deities punished hunters and brought bad luck to the family of a man who hunted on sacred mountains where deities dwelled.

Tsezang was afraid of this rider's sudden appearance. He suddenly recalled that some days ago, he had found a freshly-killed deer on a holy mountain and had taken home the flesh the wolves had left. His grandparents had taught him to ask the mountain deities' permission before taking flesh, but he had forgotten to say, "*Ngekhyolalongwayinkubamin* 'I am not stealing from you, I am begging you'." There was no problem if you said this.

Tsezang grew more terrified, imagining a mountain deity had come to punish him for taking the deer flesh without asking permission. When the rider came closer, he realized he had a rifle on his back. Tsezang was petrified. The hair on his neck stood up. His oily, red, round face turned pale. Unable to scream, he sat like a wooden image. Fortunately, the rider spoke to him in human language but, not quickly recovering, Tsezang could only reply when the man dismounted and sat by him.

Donlo was a great hunter in Tsezang's community. Donlo gently stroked Tsezang's head after reading the expression on his troubled face and asked sympathetically, "How are you? Are you OK?"

Tsezang did not respond and began wailing loudly.

Donlo thought his grandmother had passed away and finally asked, "Are you hungry? Are you ill?"

After a bit, Tsezang put his head down, plucked a blade of long grass, and broke it into small bits. Donlo noticed Tsezang's cheeks were becoming increasingly flushed. Finally, he replied, "I thought you were a mountain deity, coming to kill me," and giggled quietly.

Tsezang's genuine explanation earned Donlo's sympathy. He stroked Tsezang's head again and said, "I am your maternal uncle. I am responsible for you. I promised your mother I'd look after you as she was dying."

Dusk came. Donlo and Tsezang took Tsezang's seven horses back home. They did not speak. Tsezang rode behind his uncle. The wind blew ash and dirt near Tsezang's tent. The family's watchdog barked at his uncle. These noises made Tsezang's feel more isolated and alone. Regretting that he had ever been born, he thought, again, "My birth killed my mother. I have committed the most horrible sin."

Donlo and Badmo chatted while having dinner. Tsezang went to bed without eating, placing his head on the old sheepskin robe full of holes that he had worn as a baby. He folded it for a pillow that had been drenched by his silent tears countless times, and then dried, becoming so stiff that it hurt his head and ears. He tried unsuccessfully to sleep. Mulling over how to atone for his sin, he finally slept.

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One sunny winter day, locals headed to the tent of Jamlu, the community leader. Old people basked in the sun and leaned against Jamlu's family's yak-dung-wall that circled the tent. Sunshine began to melt the icy yard, filling the air with the smell of yak dung and urine. Some children played excitedly, throwing yak dung at each other. Children too shy to play with the other children held one of their parents' robe sleeves. Some who had gathered seemed very unhappy, knowing it was the day the leaders would announce a year's payment.

Leader Jamlu emerged from his tent. Locals quieted as children ran to their parents and sat near them. Tsezang sat alone at the end of a row, imagining his year's payment would be five RMB for herding horses. His horses were fatter than other herders' horses. He imagined buying a sheep from the commune for three RMB and then celebrating his grandmother's eightieth birthday.

Unfortunately, he only got a half RMB, because he had to compensate for two horses killed by wolves. He regretted visiting his relatives and neighbors and ignoring the herd of horses. He had let them roam everywhere until night when he drove them back home. Sometimes he ate delicious meals in his relatives' homes and on other, unlucky days, he had gone hungry.

Tsezang was disappointed by his payment and astonished when community leaders praised three hunters from his community and awarded them a fat sheep as a reward for killing wolves. Brimming with admiration, some locals also vowed to hunt wolves the next year so their families could also enjoy delicious, fresh mutton.

Locals laughed loudly when Jamlu detailed how the hunters had stumbled upon a wolf cub while hunting, had shot and killed it to see who was the best shot, and then brought the carcass to the commune leaders.

Tsezang normally reported what he saw to his grandmother, but this time, he said nothing about the meeting. His grandmother was busy making butter lamps, melting a chunk of butter in a pot on the adobe stove. Tsezang knew there was little butter to eat, but he never scolded his grandmother. He let her do whatever she wanted.

Wrinkles covered the grandmother's face as she lit a butter lamp. She was very old, and he worried that she would die soon. He knew he would regret it if he could not finance a celebration for her eightieth birthday and pondered again how to get a sheep for the celebration. His neighbor, Belzang, had bought a sheep at a very low price from the commune and had celebrated his grandfather's eightieth birthday. Participants at the celebration agreed it was the best party they had ever joined.

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One sunny day in May, Tsezang and his friend, Zanglo, searched big caves in a narrow valley. They had heard that wolves had killed many yaks in this valley. Tsezang believed Zanglo's declaration that catching and killing a wolf cub was better than herding horses for a year and being paid a half RMB. They looked for cubs the whole day but returned home empty-handed that night.

Grandmother Badmo noticed Tsezang's lack of interest in herding and encouraged him to take good care of the horses. She told him hunting and hurting sentient beings were hideous acts, explaining that people could atone for their sins if they stopped hunting and regretted the cruel things they had done to animals.

Tsezang welcomed this, recalling how his mother had died giving birth to him. He promised his grandmother he would be a vegetarian and would stop killing lice on his body and in his hair.

Some days later, Zanglo came to Tsezang's tent and asked him to search for wolf cubs with him. Tsezang refused, but Zanglo pleaded, so Tsezang reluctantly followed his best friend, who was very kind to him.

The sunshine made them thirsty. They drank a lot of fresh water from a creek, and Tsezang napped near the stream. Meanwhile, Zanglo wiped perspiration from his brow while searching for a wolf den. When he saw Tsezang napping, he wondered why he had lost interest in searching for wolves.

When Tsezang woke up, he saw Zanglo with his uncle, Donlo, who was on horseback with a rifle on his back. Tsezang knew Donlo had been hunting. When Donlo explained that hunting was not a good thing for teenagers to do, Tsezang smiled and said, "Uncle Donlo, we are not hunting. We are going to catch a wolf cub."

"How could you catch cubs without any experience?" Uncle Donlo asked. "It's better if you go home and herd livestock."

Uncle Donlo read Zanglo's unhappy face. He understood that a proud teenager would reject criticism.

Believing he could catch a cub, Zanglo retorted, "We will catch a cub! Don't denigrate us."

Uncle Donlo chortled, realizing that Zanglo had gumption and said approvingly, "OK. Let's hunt together! You can be my assistants!"

Since it was early evening, both boys agreed when Uncle Donlo suggested returning home to prepare for their hunt the next day.

Tsezang went to bed after dinner and thought again about his grandmother's birthday celebration. He worried about his promise to his grandmother not to kill living beings, but still felt he had to prepare a sheep for the celebration. The easy way to meet his goal would be to catch a cub, take it to the leaders, and get a sheep as a reward. But he also knew he would accumulate sin if he caught a wolf cub, and the leaders killed it. Considering all of this gave him a headache.


Early the next morning, Tsezang headed to Uncle Donlo's tent, while glancing back at his family's tent several times. When he had almost reached his destination, he stopped and stood silently. Suddenly, he turned, saw his grandmother holding a string of prayer beads in her left hand near the tent door, and suddenly recalled that today was his mother's death anniversary.

9

INJUSTICE

Characters

Dawa	Tsering's maternal uncle
Donbe	Tsering's brother, killed by Dorje
Dorje	Drashi's son, killed by Drakba
Drakba	Dawa's son, killed Dorje
Drashi	the community's leader's brother
Tsedon	a rich man
Tsekyi	Tsering and Donbe's mother
Tsering	Tsekyi's son, Donbe's brother
Tsomo	Drashi's daughter

 One chilly winter afternoon, Tsering lay tiredly on the ground near his family's tent, listlessly registering seven sheep calmly munching on dry grass nearby. Recalling that he had herded sheep for his community leader's family for a year, he knew he should appreciate Tsedon giving him this opportunity. He had also given him seven sheep and a new sheepskin robe. It was not easy for poor people to get a job, and he understood he was lucky.

He stared at the new robe next to him. It was folded and somehow resembled a plump marmot. A smile flickered for a moment across his unwashed face. But suddenly, he plunged into a pool of grief, tears mournfully trickling from his big dark-brown eyes.

Realizing such emotion served no useful purpose, he wiped away his tears. He folded the new robe and rested his head on it. Wrapped up in his sheepskin, he tried to nap.

As dusk deepened, he entered his family's empty tent. Assuming his mother, Tsekyi, was still at a neighbor's tent, he lit a butter lamp and made a fire in the adobe stove. He felt especially lonely when the blackened kettle began singing on the stove. He didn't feel like eating alone.

Finally, his mother arrived. They had not seen each other for a year. Both smiled. They were happy.

After a meal, Tsekyi took out a yak-skin bag from her robe pouch, opened it, and poured the barley flour it contained into two bowls. Tsering pitied his mother,

who had worked all day earning only two bowls of flour. Nevertheless, he noticed that she was pleased to be able to do chores for the neighbor.

Recalling that he had not shown his mother his new robe, he unfolded it and proudly held it up. He was startled when she burst into tears and wailed. Understanding, he hurriedly stuffed the robe back into a black yak-hair bag, trying to delete what this tragic reminder was all about.

They lay down for the night in a silent tent that seemed empty. Unable to sleep, Tsering wrestled with memories. Three years ago, his brother, Donbe, had been a hard-working shepherd. Their community's leader's brother, Drashi, hoped he would herd his family's sheep as long as he wanted. All of Drashi's family members were kind to Donbe, who was content to live with them.

One morning Donbe noticed Drashi's daughter, Tsomo, had hung a new sheepskin robe over a tent-rope to sun. Attracted by the robe's beauty, Donbe recalled that his mother often mentioned how wonderful it would be to own a new sheepskin robe. She periodically scolded Donbe for being so incapable that he could not even buy or make a new robe for her.

On that day, Donbe asked Drashi for permission to visit his mother for a couple of days. Drashi agreed.

Donbe mounted a horse and rode toward home. When he saw his family's tent in the far distance, he realized his mother and brother were both standing by the tent entrance. Hearing the clatter of horse hooves pounding the frozen ground behind him, he turned and saw Drashi's son, Dorje, holding a sword in his right hand. His black horse was panting, perspiration dripping from its legs and belly.

Tsering dared not continue recollecting. He panted and stared through the tent's smoke-hole at stars that seemed to shiver. He felt cold.

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Three years later, Tsering and his maternal uncle, Dawa, were counting yaks in Dawa's yak enclosure, which was near Tsering's tent. They separated eighty yaks. Tsering and Dawa then rode two horses and drove the eighty yaks toward Drashi's tent. Drashi was standing outside, spinning a prayer wheel in his right hand and holding a string of prayer beads in his left.

Another killing. Tsering felt sorry that Drakba had killed Dorje in revenge for Donbe's death. Rage burned in Tsering's heart when he saw Drashi. Dawa had given the eighty yaks to Drashi's family to compensate for Dorje's death.

Tsering headed home after eating in Uncle Dawa's tent. He was confused. Why had Drashi's family given only eight yaks to his family in compensation for Dorje killing Donbe. Drashi was the brother of Tsedon, the most powerful person in their community. Locals obeyed all his commands. Tsering guessed that explained why only a few yaks had been given.

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When Tsekyi saw Tsering riding a black horse near her family's tent, she recalled her oldest son and tears flowed. That horrible moment flashed in her mind again: Donbe

had tried to speak after Dorje had stabbed him. Dorje had tried to pull the sword from Donbe's gut but failed. Donbe attempted to dismount but, unable to move very easily, had gripped the sword in his right hand.

Dorje methodically untied the new sheepskin robe from Donbe's saddle, and as blood puddled on the ground, he grabbed the robe and spat, "Shameless thief! Go to Hell!" whipped his horse and disappeared.

Donbe had raised his head a little and gazed at his family's tent. His mother and brother rushed to him as he slowly fell from the horse.

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Tsering dismounted but did not enter his family's tent. He hunched near the tent entrance and pondered why Drashi's family gave only eight yaks to compensate for Donbe's death. "Is there justice for impoverished, powerless families?" he mumbled.




10

MIRROR

Characters

Badmo	Tseko's wife
Dobo	Dorlo's brother
Dorlo	Dobo's brother
Tseko	Badmo's husband
Tsomo	Dobo's wife

uffled, barely audible sounds emanated from a tent. Tseko, in his early sixties and a father of two, sat cross-legged on his bed, reciting scriptures. He did this for two hours every morning, resembling a meditator with his sheepskin robe draped over his upper body and his lower body wrapped in another warm robe. When he finished, he unfolded his now-stiff legs and left the tent to urinate.

Hearing a ewe bleat, he strode to the sheep pen, wearing a robe without a sash. Noticing his long sleeves brushing the frozen ground, he flung them over his shoulders and guessed a ewe had given birth in the night and the lamb had frozen to death. He searched for a lamb's carcass but found nothing but a few bits of sheep hair and fresh bone fragments. Imagining what had happened, he cursed his family's watchdogs.

Badmo read anger in her husband's face as she offered him breakfast and put a soot-bottomed pot half full of water on the adobe stove in the tent.

Tseko ferociously said, "Our family's watchdogs are useless! Don't add a lot of flour to that pot. They need to be hungry to be more alert. Last night, wolves attacked our sheep and killed a lamb."

Badmo ignored her husband, and surreptitiously added a generous amount of flour to the pot. Afraid to say anything directly to her husband, she quietly murmured, stressing the importance of reducing the suffering of all sentient beings.

Some days later, Tseko was very ill. Concerned, Badmo urged him to rest at home and promised to take good care of the sheep. However, Tseko worried about her limited experience herding sheep so, after breakfast, he dressed warmly and herded the sheep to a mountain covered with lush grass. Staring after him as he grew smaller in the distance, Badmo realized that he had become as thin as a skeleton.

After supper, Badmo sat next to her husband. She knew his health was deteriorating, though he said he was fine. Upset about his poor health, she grew angrier with her youngest son, Dorlo, who roamed about and was not filial. However, she did not want to have another argument with Dorlo about his level of concern for his parents.

The following day, Dorlo's older brother, Dobo, got up early and made a fire in the adobe stove in the tent he shared with his wife and children. He woke his children just as the black kettle began whistling on the stove. He asked his wife, Tsomo, to herd the yaks signaling that he would visit the township town. While there, Dobo met people from Tseko's community and inquired about his parents. He felt uneasy if he did not hear news of them at least once a month.

Dobo felt guilty that he could not often care for and spend more time with his parents. He had married Tsomo and now lived in her community, which was far from his parents' tent.

Dorlo returned to his parents' home only when he heard his father was sick. As he squatted near his father's bed, Tseko gently stroked his son's head, saying nothing but smiling broadly.

Badmo made *zamba*, and prepared a bowl of hot milk for her husband, and asked Dorlo to have lunch with her. Dorlo told his mother to take good care of his father and said he would herd the sheep.

After Dorlo's departure, Tseko said that Dorlo was a good son and he was proud of him, because every time he got sick, Dorlo was the first to visit.

Dorlo herded the sheep for five days. Each day the number of sheep decreased. When his mother asked why Dorlo explained that wolves were attacking the flock.

Badmo did not tell her husband about the diminishing flock. She wondered why her son was so eager to herd their sheep and wondered why no vultures hovered in the sky.

Five days later, Dobo arrived and upon seeing his father, tears trickled from his eyes.

Tseko was not very glad to see him. Anger colored his face. Maybe it was because Dobo had only visited several days into his illness and maybe also because he thought Dobo was feigning concern and actually did not love him very much. After all, Dobo had married and moved into his wife's tent in a distant community.

Dobo urged his father to go to the township clinic, but Tseko stubbornly refused.

Dobo spent several days with his parents. During that time, Tseko seemed to be improving, so he felt very glad to be with his parents. When he left for his own home, he felt sad that his father had rejected his suggestion to have his health checked. He also understood that his father thought he was not filial.

The next day, when Tseko got up and went out of the tent, he saw two riders galloping toward his home. Once they arrived, he asked them to dismount and welcomed them into his tent. Instead, they bellowed, "Where is Dorlo? He has given

us twenty sheep in the last five days, but he owes us ten more. He was our gambling mate. We'll kill him if he doesn't give us ten more sheep in the next two days!" and then rode away in a cloud of dust.

Shocked by what he had just heard, Tseko staggered back into the tent.

Badmo was looking into a piece of broken mirror. She had heard it all and immediately understood why their sheep had become fewer and fewer. She also recalled the last time her husband had been ill. Dorlo was the first to visit and had "kindly" offered to herd. Their sheep had also steadily decreased. She looked at her husband dejectedly, poured warm water into a red basin, asked Tseko to wash his face, handed him the piece of broken mirror, and said, "Here - the mirror."

Tseko stared at his reflection and took a long, deep breath.




11

TSOMO AND THE LITTLE BOY

Characters

Dorje	Lhamo's husband
Drashi	Tsomo's neighbor's son
Lhamo	Dorje's wife
Tsering	Drashi's playmate
Tsomo	a beautiful woman
Zanglo	Tsomo's husband

somo wore a sheepskin robe trimmed with bright, colored cloth. As she squatted near her family's tent flap, she held her right sleeve over her mouth. Her family members talked endlessly inside. No one came outside to chat with her.

In the early evening, Tsomo gazed at her neighbor's six-year-old boy, Drashi, plucking fragrant flowers on a stream bank near his family's tent. He sniffed the flowers, smiled, and then delightedly tried to catch butterflies flitting among the flowers. When the little boy tumbled, Tsomo murmured, "Oh my Buddha!"

The little boy lay on his back, sniffed the flowers clutched in his hand, and imagined that the flocks of floating clouds above his head were his neighbor's sheep. Feeling sleepy, he stood and noticed Tsomo, stared at her for a while, and then rushed to his home.

"Mother! I saw Sister Tsomo squatting by her family's tent door yesterday and today. She looks very sad. What happened?" asked Drashi.

"Dear baby! Little boys shouldn't ask the same questions older people do," replied his mother, Lhamo.

"Mother, may I go talk to Sister Tsomo? I want to play with her son, Tsering," implored Drashi.

"No, you can't play with Tsering," declared his father, Dorje.

Drashi wondered why his father did not give permission and wanted to ask but dared not. He blinked and stared at his father, clad in a sheepskin robe trimmed with black cloth, sitting cross legged in the right part of the tent. His greasy, unreadable face scared Drashi. No longer looking at him, he clambered onto his mother's lap.

"Tsomo wants to divorce, but her parents are urging her to return to her husband's home," said Lhamo.

"She shouldn't divorce. Her husband's family is wealthy, and his father is the leader of their community. Locals obey him. She would never find another man with such a good family background to marry," reasoned Dorje.

"Of course! Everyone wants to marry someone wealthy, but a woman wants her husband to be kind and to love her; otherwise, they won't be happy!" exclaimed Lhamo.

"Mother, you are right. Sister Tsomo is unhappy. I saw her sitting alone and not talking to her family members," said Drashi.

The parents looked at their cute little boy and smiled but ignored what he had said.

"It's so hard for a woman to live alone. Maybe Tsomo should return to her husband's home and live with him, even if he is cruel and beats her," suggested Lhamo.

"Her husband is kind to her family and helps them. Her parents are pleased about this. They admire Zanglo and are persuading Tsomo to return to his home," said Dorje.

"I hate Father when he beats me. I don't want him to beat me again. I don't love Father when he doesn't let me do what I want and forces me to do something else," Drashi whispered to his mother.

"Tsomo told her parents Zanglo treats her like a slave. She can't bear such abuse and also can't forget a handsome local man she has loved since they were children. She wants to marry him. Anyway, life is unfair. We can't do what we want because everything is fate. You can't change it. Why didn't she tell her parents about her lover before they arranged the marriage?" said Lhamo.

The little boy thought a powerless person must follow those with power just as he obeyed his father's commands. Though eager to do what he wanted, he did not if his father disagreed.

"Tsomo's parents thought she would have a happy life if she married a rich man. They didn't want their daughter to marry her poor lover," said Dorje.

"Tsomo's parents regret they arranged the marriage and forced her to marry. Now, they insist she return to her husband's home. Zanglo told Tsomo's parents he would kill her and her lover if Tsomo divorces him and destroys his family's reputation. They also worry about Tsomo's reputation and think no one will marry her if she divorces," said Dorje.

The little boy thought, "Sister Tsomo should not worry about her reputation. She can have a happy life with her lovely son. If I were Sister Tsomo, I would play with my son and not think about unhappy things."

"Tsomo just committed suicide. She hung herself with a herding sling in her small tent, pitched next to her family's tent," the father's brother announced, entering the tent, interrupting their conversation.

"Oh no! How miserable!" said Dorje.

The little boy wanted to pee and peaked through a small hole in his family's tent door. He stepped back and called, "Mother, it's dark outside. There's probably a ghost. I'm scared."




12

TSOMO'S DREAM

Characters

Tsekyi	Tsomo's mother
Tsomo	Tsekyi's daughter
Yangchen	a famous local singer

somo stood motionlessly at the yak enclosure gate, her back to the enclosure's yak-dung wall. She gazed again and again at her favorite orphan calf and then upward, to the shimmering stars. Her red cheeks grew ever redder from the frigid winter's sharp wind. She pressed her robe sleeve to her cracked lips and then inspected the blood on the sleeve. She pondered while staring at one, glittering star and realized that she had lost her dream for years and years.

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The limitless grassland was vigorous and calm after a slight rain. Colorful rainbows decorated spectacular mountains that reared above winding rivers. Butterflies flaunted their beauty, flitting over and among nameless sweet-smelling flowers whose fragrance delighted every living creature. Tsomo plucked a flower and sniffed it. A big smile covered her fifteen-year-old face. As a melodious herding song echoed from far away, she grew emotionally intoxicated. Mounted on the back of a placid black horse a red-scarfed herder sang, stimulating Tsomo's latent musical talents. She nervously tried to imitate the melody.

In the early evening, she quietly repeated an incomplete version of the song in the shadow of a shrub. Out of nowhere, a mellow breeze rustled green, lush leaves. A leaf brushed against Tsomo's right cheek. Cool and comfortable, she slowly closed her eyes, savoring the experience.

A song rose once more from the grassland. Tsomo sleepily rubbed her eyes, yawned, stretched out her legs, and listened intently. After a while, the song subsided. Breathing quickly, she quietly stood up, put her right hand to her forehead, and gazed at the singer, who was crossing a high mountain peak, her red scarf fluttering vibrantly in the wind. The singer soon vanished, so Tsomo drove her yaks back home.

The next morning, Tsomo stood next to her mother, Tsekyi, who was milking a white yak while chanting scriptures. Tsekyi was curious why Tsomo was so concentrated, and thought, "Maybe she's meditating."

Tsomo quietly sang again. Tsekyi recognized the lyrics and realized Tsomo was singing a familiar herding song. Not wanting their neighbors to hear, Tsekyi glared at Tsomo who stuck out her tongue and lowered her head. Tsekyi was determined to scold her, but no words came out of her wide-open mouth.

Tsomo recalled her grandmother telling her it was improper for a singer to sing near their home because the singer would be reborn in the realm of greatest suffering after death. Her grandmother compared singing to tormented howling and grieving. Tsomo dared not look at her mother's disapproving face and kept her head down as her mother angrily scolded, "Shameless! How dare you sing near our home! Neighbors, relatives, and your brothers will hear you! Foolish girl! Don't you know it's disgraceful to sing near your home and our neighbors?"

Tsomo stuck out her tongue again as tears trickled down her face and splattered on the ground. Tsomo wondered why women sang *mani* melodies and milking songs near their home.

"You want to marry a man whose family is far from your parents' home? You don't care about destroying your reputation?" her mother demanded.

Tsomo's grandmother had told a story about one of her herding-mates who was very beautiful and often sang near her home, defying her parents' objections. Her parents worried about her reputation and urged her to at least sing in the mountains. However, she loved to sing, and nothing changed. Unfortunately, she could not marry her lover, a very handsome young man from her community. Though they had secretly gone to the local monastery and vowed to marry each other, their dream never materialized.

The young beauty eventually wed a man who lived far from her home. She regretted ignoring her parents' advice.

Tsomo again stuck out her tongue and nodded her head a little, indicating she understood.

Tsomo was eager to learn new songs by participating in weddings. Locals enjoyed songs at wedding parties and praised Yangchen, a famous local singer who often sang when she herded yaks high in the mountains. Her sharp, clear voice attracted many herdsman.

Once, Tsomo was disappointed because Yangchen did not sing at a wedding. After the event, Tsomo rushed over, and respectfully asked, "Why didn't you sing today?"

A big smile blossomed on Yangchen's beautiful face as she looked at her brother, Tsebo, who was clad in a cassock and sitting cross-legged at the head of a row. She responded, "My oldest brother joined the wedding, so I dared not sing."

Tsomo nodded, understanding that it was unthinkable for women to sing near their brothers, male cousins, and monks.

Three years later, Tsomo told her grandmother that she was in love with a handsome local man, wanted to marry him, and lead a happy life.

Tsomo's grandmother affectionately stroked her head and said, "I came from far away to marry your grandfather. You are young and don't understand many things. Local people said I left my home place and married my husband, whose family was a long way from mine because I sang a lot when I was young."

Tsomo silently stared at her grandmother. Afterward, she decided that she would not sing until she married her current lover. She regretted that she had sung as her grandmother had and prayed that she would be able to marry her current lover.

That particular star still shimmered in a darkening sky as Tsomo withdrew from her tumbled thoughts. Tears streaked down her cheeks and quickly cooled, refreshing her. Just at that moment out of nowhere, an arrow of cold wind pierced Tsomo's heart. Reluctantly, she headed home.

13

PAIN

Characters

Dorje	Tsomo's son
Dondrub	Tsomo's brother's son
Drashi	Dorje's maternal uncle
Ganglha	a rich woman
Kyitso	a poor woman
Kyidzom	a childless woman
Tsomo	Dorje's mother

Morning. Herders sang on horseback while driving their livestock to the mountains, enjoying the view of a glorious mountain ridge rearing into the blue sky. Thick white clouds decorated the holy mountain's peak. Many creeks flowed lyrically in every direction at the foot of the sacred mountain. Various birds chirped on vigorously growing tree branches, as butterflies lazily circled among aromatic, colorful summer blossoms. The small Yangru Tribe was camped at the bottom of the sacred, dignified mountain. Men from other tribes regularly offered incense to this mountain deity.

Every morning, Yangru Tribe women and girls got up early and milked yaks while singing milking tunes. This attracted many strong, handsome men who had come to offer incense to the mountain deity.

Locals believed that no tribe would invade and steal yaks from the Yangru Tribe because the mountain deity regarded the tribe as a family member and protected it. The Yangru Tribe was the most peaceful and happiest of all the tribes in Ngonlung County.

When it came time to move from the summer pasture to the winter pasture, Tsomo hurriedly packed her family belongings into sacks and yak-skin bags. With the cuff of her right sleeve, she wiped the dirt and sweat from her weathered face.

Her yak-hair tent was the smallest among the tribe's households, but it seemed a perfect fit for her family. Though it was faded and full of patches, she preferred it. Three generations of her family had lived in it, and she never desired a new or bigger one. This tent was precious to her and provided ample space for her few bags.

After packing up everything except for her wooden bucket, which she would attach to a yak pack frame, she rushed outside and called to her brother's son, Dondrub, who was busy untying his family's livestock, preparing to move to the winter pasture.

He ignored her. Anger flared in her heart. "Fool! Is he deaf? People are only polite to the rich and powerful!" she scolded.

Three of her brother's family members were nearby and also ignored her. Tsomo was extremely upset by this and curious why her nephew ignored her, especially since he was the only person who sincerely cared about Tsomo and her family. Dondrub was the most compassionate and sociable person in the tribe. His dream was to become a monk and live a peaceful, tranquil life.

After she had shouted more than ten times, hoping to hear good news from Dondrub, she instead heard that her oldest son, Dorje, would not return home as soon as she wished.

Despondently entering her tent, she sat on a pack near the tent entrance, looked outside despairingly, and noticed a calf was still tied. She put her palms together, held them near her forehead, and piously prayed, "Oh my Buddha! Every living being is so appropriately piteous. How could I leave this calf tied till noon? How cruel and forgetful I have been."

She picked up her wooden pail and walked to the calf's mother. She did not need to hobble this yak's front legs as was necessary for the other mother yaks. She untied the famished calf, which eagerly ran to its mother and nursed, rhythmically butting the udder. Meanwhile, Tsomo's mind was full of thoughts about her oldest son's gambling addiction. He had taken ten of her yaks the previous year to partially pay off his debts.

When the calf's mouth was full of milk bubbles, she gently took her muddy, milk-covered right hand and tugged the rope around the calf's neck with her left hand. It was not easy to pull a calf from its mother. The calf jerked back, upsetting her. Her tenderness evaporating, she roughly twisted the calf's tail, pulled the hair on its back, and tied it to a tether that the other calves were tied to, keeping them away from the mother yaks.

Taking a deep breath, she lamented, "Poor little calf! I'm your only helper when ruthless wolves attack you, but how stoutly you resist me!" and kicked the calf's belly with all her strength.

She walked around the calf, breathing hard. Standing near the mother yak, she put her hands on its back and pondered, recalling how her third husband had beaten her oldest son badly after he had defied him. As she recalled her past life and especially her failed marriages, she automatically wiped away tears, refusing to wallow in painful reminiscences.

All the tribal households had moved to the winter pasture, except for Tsomo's family and Kyidzom, a single, childless woman in her fifties. Tsomo drove her twenty yaks to a small hill near her home and then went to visit Kyidzom.

Meanwhile, Tsomo's riding yak stood motionless near her tent, like a watchdog protecting the family. Tsomo rode this gentle yak when she drove the yaks back to the yak enclosure from the mountains and hills. She had developed pain in her knees two years earlier, which made having a mount important.

One day Tsomo had ridden the yak to consult a local traditional doctor, who suggested that she lose weight and see a physician who practiced modern medicine. She did not tell Dorje what the doctor had said, thinking that the medical treatment would be expensive, and no one would be willing to accompany her to a hospital in an urban area.

She now focused on finding money to pay high school fees for her youngest son, Tsering. She hoped he would have a happy, satisfying life in school, just like the children of rich families. Each time she got some money from selling a yak or wild herbs she had collected, she sent most of it to Tsering without her oldest son's knowledge.

Kyidzom warmly welcomed her into her small tent, full of the odor of *zamba*. They had a simple breakfast. "Do you want more *zamba*?" offered Kyidzom.

"No thanks, but I'll have another steamed bun with a bowl of milk tea," hungry Tsomo replied.

"Have as much as you like, but there are few steamed buns. Probably you won't be full. Meat soup with steamed bread is wonderful. My grandmother often cooked meat soup and steamed bread for me. It's extremely delicious and my favorite meal. Unfortunately, I haven't had meat for a long time. It's almost been a year since you gave me a calf's front leg. You know how it is, no husband, no meat. No one likes to sin by killing yaks for someone else," Kyidzom confided.

Tsomo understood her friend. "I'll be full, so don't worry. I also really like both *zamba* and bread with meat soup. My grandmother also cooked meat soup for me," she said quietly and bowed her head, tears moistening her cheeks.

Kyidzom felt sorry for her and comforted, "Don't cry. Everyone makes mistakes. Only holy lama are perfect."

Tsomo sat quietly for a long time before sobbing, "I didn't make a mistake just once. I chose my husbands and left my mother three times. I never imagined they would leave me when I left Mother."

Kyidzom knew Tsomo would talk about her cruel husbands and how they had tortured her and her sons. She often talked about this when they met. She said, "You are so lucky to have two sons, unlike me. It's really difficult to live as a single woman. I yearn to live with a man."

Tsomo moved near Kyidzom and said, "Don't easily trust a man. No man understands our feelings and our miserable situation. Men only want to use our bodies. I'm sorry for my two fatherless sons."

Kyidzom nodded in agreement and said, "Yes! You are so right, but we need a husband to prevent cruel youngsters from bullying us. Last night, I had a night visitor. He told me about your lover, a man your age who visits you at night. You're

young enough. Why don't you marry again? I want to marry, but no man will marry me because they think I'm poor and too old, although they will visit me at night."

A smile played on Tsomo's face as she sipped milk tea, and then asked, "But, how can I avoid rumors?"

Adding some dry yak dung to the stove Kyidzom continued, "Ignore what others say. What matters is having a man who'll take your burdens and put them on his shoulders."

This conversation made Tsomo recall her fourth marriage, but then she noticed her riding yak tied near her tent. She rushed over and untied it, feeling sorry that the yak had been unable to graze or drink the whole day. The day before she had ridden it to drive the other yaks back home. She had fallen off as it quickly descended the mountain. She now felt doubly guilty.

One of Tsomo's herding-mates had told her a story he had heard from a lama about a man who treated his horse very badly. The local lama met the horse's master and urged him to repent, but he refused and had died from a painful illness a few days later.

She consoled herself that she had saved the yak's life when her oldest son had wanted to sell it. She now vowed never again to be unkind to her yak and murmured a mantra repetitively.

The following morning, Dorje got up early, packed, and readied two yaks. His mother was still angry that he had returned home a day late. She worried that the tribe leader would punish her family and scold her for not moving on time to the winter pasture, a violation of tribal rules. Ignoring her, Dorje got ready to drive the livestock and grabbed the watchdog's chain to prevent it from attacking a passerby. The dog pulled back and angrily glared at him. Dorje knew his mother was kind to the mastiff. He had suggested many times that they not feed the dog but instead, let him find food for himself. His mother disagreed and gave it *zamba* soup and leftovers twice a day.

Every time Dorje came home, his mother told him to go to the township town and mill barley. He knew why his family's *zamba* supply finished so quickly, but he never complained.

Tsomo wanted Dorje to marry and care for the family. Despite feeling embarrassed, Tsomo had raised the matter of marriage with Dorje. She hated it when Dorje wandered here and there and sold her yaks to pay off his debts. She also made sure that her brother, Drashi, would not give Dorje money to satisfy his creditors.

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A wooden cabin sat in a deep, narrow valley, where no one lived, except for Tsomo's family. Both sides of the valley were so high that it was impossible to enjoy the sunrise. Thick, dense trees covered one valley mountain. Anyone hearing the harsh wail of the wind blowing through the trees felt cold and forlorn.

Tsomo and Dorje set off with their yaks for the winter pasture and reached the cabin painted with red earth and yak dung in the evening.

They soon had all their belongings in the cabin that had only one room with two windows. The cabin reeked of mice and decay.

Tsomo made a fire in the adobe stove. There was no water, so Dorje took a bucket and walked to the door. Tsomo said, "You are twenty and old enough to marry."

Dorje paused, pretended not to hear, and walked to a nearby spring. As he scooped water into his bucket, he recalled a story a friend had told him about a virgin boy, Tsedon, who had visited a girl:

Romantically inexperienced, he had not given even so much as a little kiss to the girl and had soon left. Later, the girl told others about this encounter. Much unkind gossip soon circulated in the local community. The boy's friends and peers joked and laughed at him. One day not long after these hurtful rumors began spreading, he drove his family's yaks to a high mountain and returned home for breakfast. After dismounting, he met his mother in his family's house yard. She carried a metal basin full of ash, which, to make things worse, she flung in front of him.

The whole day he felt uncomfortable about this, recalling his grandmother saying, "*Nangssngamo'ithalbagyong, dgongphyidro'ithalbagrog* 'Good luck comes when you encounter someone discarding ash in the evening, bad luck comes when this happens in the morning'."

Unable to bear this, Tsedon left his community and became a monk in a monastery far from his home.

Dorje worried his mother would disapprove if he married Ganglha, the only girl he visited at night. They loved each other. Ganglha's family was wealthy, and his mother often talked about how rich, powerful people disdained the weak and poor.

He vividly recalled his maternal uncle, Drashi, visiting after his mother had left her second husband. His uncle had looked at him and admonished, "Never marry a girl from a rich family, even if she loves you and is kind to you. Her family will torment you, hold you in contempt, and will treat you as a hired herder. They will never treat you like a real family member, even if you live with them for many years."

Dorje, however, was addicted to gambling. Having many debts, he had decided against marrying Kytso, the daughter of a poor family, though they had grown up together and had been in love as children. Once, when they were herding calves near a creek, he had said, "I will marry you when I'm old enough. Don't marry anyone else, or I'll become a monk."

He felt guilty recalling this, especially when he heard that Kytso continued to love him and was waiting for him to bring her to his home. He knew he had few choices. The only thing he could do was to marry a rich family's daughter and pay off his debts, ignoring his mother and uncle's advice.

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Two years passed. Dorje and Ganglha married and divorced.

One chilly morning Dorje was busily doing chores while also caring for his daughter, who Ganglha had left in his home after the divorce.

Tsomo was not sure that she should milk a weak calf's mother, worrying the calf would die if she did not let it nurse all its mother's milk, but there was no alternative. It was the only source of milk for her granddaughter. She murmured complaints that Dorje had married Ganglha, but then a smile appeared on her ruddy cheeks. She recalled that Tsering had promised to buy her a pair of cheap fabric shoes when he returned home from his high school during the winter holiday.

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Tsering sat near the stove and talked to his mother and brother about his happy time at school. He looked at the floor when Dorje asked if the other students were kind to him. He never talked about his real relationships with others to his brother and mother. He did not want to worry them about how badly he was treated because his family was poor.

Tsering sincerely did not want to trouble his family. He understood his family's situation was unlike that of rich families. He had to talk to them, however, because he needed their financial support to study at university, which he hoped to begin the next year.

His mother was astonished when Dorje said, "We could sell your riding yak to support Tsering's university study."

While she hoped that her son would have a bright future and a happy life, she refused to sell her beloved riding yak to generate cash for his study expenses.


The next morning Tsering got up early and without having breakfast, drove his family's yaks into the narrow valley while the rest of his family slumbered.

14

REVENGE

Characters

Dawa	Tsedon's son
Dradon	Drakba's brother
Drakba	Lhamo's husband
Lhamo	Drakba's wife
Tsebo	Dawa's friend
Tsedon	Dawa's father
Tsomo	Dawa's mother

awa couldn't sleep. How exciting to visit his father's friend the next day! He was sure the journey would be the most exciting time yet in his short life. He began chanting scriptures, which was, according to his grandmother, the best way to go to sleep.

Dawa got up early the next morning. As he pulled on his sheepskin robe, he realized it was stained with dried blood. He put on his sister's extra sheepskin robe while she was still in bed and hurriedly had a bowl of *zamba* for breakfast. His father stretched and yawned, slowly pulled on his sheepskin, and went out of the tent, without wearing a sash.

His mother, Tsomo, took a kettle from the adobe stove, poured hot water into a red plastic basin, and scooped cold water from a big metal pot and added it to the basin.

Tsedon groggily entered the tent, washed his face and hands, and calmly sat cross-legged near the stove. Dawa burst in, concerned his sister would wake up, knowing she would scold him for wearing her sheepskin. He stared at his father, who was gloomily having breakfast. He hoped his father would finish soon and tried to say something, but his father ignored him, not noticing his panic.

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It was a chilly winter day, and Dawa could no longer hold his reins. He wiped the snot from his nose as his docile horse followed his father's horse. This was tough work because he had to do it constantly. Tsedon did not give so much as a backward glance, insensitive to his discomfort.

They finally reached their destination in the late evening. Drakba greeted them warmly, and asked his wife, Lhamo, to cook noodles. They had not met since

Drakba had moved near an army campsite. Drakba's brother was a government clerk and had a good relationship with soldiers, who were kind to Drakba and gave him bags of flour and rice, cooking oil, and spices. He had decided to stay.

Drakba and Tsedon enjoyed chatting. Dawa silently sat near the stove and said nothing, even when Lhamo asked him to have more tea. When Lhamo finished cooking, she offered noodles in dragon-decorated bowls. Dawa was startled by such beautiful bowls. First, Dawa bashfully sipped the noodle soup. Wow! It was the most delicious food he had ever tasted. Unable to control himself, he had three bowls of noodles, not noticing his father's face becoming redder and redder.

On the way home, Dawa said, "Father, you said we would spend the night at Drakba's home."

Tsedon did not respond. When they reached a flat grassland, they dismounted and let the horses graze the brown, dry grass. Dawa needed to defecate, untied his sash, pulled his sheepskin up, and squatted. His father then attacked him like a ferocious wolf savaging a lamb. While beating him, he said, "Shameless, nitwit! What happened to you? How shameful to ask for more noodles! I'll never take you to visit a family again. Shameless turd!"

They silently rode back home.

After some days, Drakba and his brother, Dradon, came to visit Tsedon. A fire raged in the depths of Dawa's heart. He wanted revenge for his father beating him. He decided to make his father angry and ashamed so went to see his friend, Tsebo, the local bad boy and said, "Tonight, we can ride beautiful horses. My family has visitors whose strong horses are energetic. I'm eager to ride Dradon's black horse. Dradon gets a lot of attention from many beautiful women when he rides his energetic horse and has a rifle on his back."

His friend agreed and decided to spend the night in Dawa's tent.


They snuck out of the tent after other family members and the visitors slept and rushed to where the visitors' horses were tied. They argued for a while, both eager to ride the beautiful black horse. Tsebo was a tough boy, and sometimes Dawa feared him, so Tsebo rode the black horse, and Dawa rode the mare. They galloped here and there, laughing in excitement until the horses were so exhausted they could no longer trot. Then they tied the horses back where they had found them.

The next morning, Tsedon was shamed to see their guests' exhausted horses with salt marks on their bellies and leg joints.

Dawa smiled when he saw the humiliation on his father's face.

15

SKIN, BLOOD, EVIL

 One sunny, pleasant summer day, the local leader's son was on a date with one of the local lama's nieces. Elders believed their destinies doomed their marriage. However, the lama divined and was pleased with the results. The boy's parents were very religious and accepted what those in high-ranking religious positions said. Younger community members agreed that both the boy and girl were good-looking and loved each other.

After three years of marriage, locals' idea about their marriage changed.

One day, the wife was on her way to fetch water near her home, suddenly, stopped, turned, and noticed three children playing by her neighbor's tent. A girl clad in red clothes left the other children and ran toward her home, crying and constantly glancing at the other children. The wife imagined that if she were the child's mother, she would scoop the little girl up in her arms and hold her until she stopped crying.

The wife squatted at the water source, ladling water into a wooden bucket but then paused, staring into the shallow creek. There were no fish. A breeze rippled the water surface, refreshing her. She blinked her beautiful eyes. After the breeze stopped, she saw her reflection in the water. She registered her beauty and a scar on her right cheek that had a history. One night her husband had been enraged when she handed him a bowl of milk tea with her left hand. A woman offering something to others with her left hand is impolite and considered ominous. Interpreting this as disrespect, her husband grabbed the stick used to rake fire from the adobe stove and struck his wife's face.

She touched the scar several times and resumed filling the bucket. She squatted, put the full bucket on her back and tried to stand, but failed in two attempts. As she waited for another woman to fetch water and help her, she gazed again into the water. When she saw the scar, she did not hate her husband. Instead, she thought she was lucky to have married him.

•••

The husband was hunting with his fellows on lofty, thickly forested mountains one chilly winter day. The men boasted about how many women they had slept with and generally had a joyful time together, though they killed no game other than a deer. Later the same day, the husband skinned the deer near his family's tent. When his wife finished tying their yaks, she came to help her husband, who was chopping the carcass into pieces and dividing them among his hunting mates. He told his wife to

put the portions in bags. Suddenly, he stuck his tongue out, and his face turned red. He wanted to say something to his wife, but nothing emerged from his mouth.

That night, the husband felt cold and could not sleep. The wind whistled outside as the watchdogs howled. His best friend had said, "Your wife can't become pregnant because she is probably a bad woman," not daring to say she was evil, although some locals said so. The husband had no evidence to suggest his wife was evil. She loved him and was very kind to his parents. He stopped pondering, kissed his wife, and sank into a deep slumber.

Several months passed. It was summer, a time when women were busy milking the yaks and churning. The couple was concerned that their family's dairy products were less than usual. For the yaks to give more milk, the husband got up early every day and took the yaks to high mountains to graze on the lush grass that grew there. His wife reported that during the first summer month, she had milked three buckets of milk every morning, but now in the second summer month, she could only get two buckets of milk.

The husband talked to a herding-mate who said, "Once a wife skinned a wild animal killed by her husband. Afterward, her family's dairy products decreased. Later, the family head consulted a lama who divined and said, 'Probably your daughter skinned an animal someone had hunted.' The husband expelled his wife from their tent and remarried. The family's dairy products then increased."

The husband said nothing. Recalling that the local lama was his wife's uncle, he decided against consulting him.

Finally, as autumn snow dusted the high mountain peaks, the husband said to his father, "One day, when you left home to visit the local lama, my wife helped me skin a deer."

His father angrily said, "Evil! No children! Few dairy products."

The husband immediately regretted what he had said, but it was too late. The wheels had already started turning.




16

STUBBORN SISTER

Characters

Dawa	Dungtso's son
Dorje	a hunter
Dungtso	Drashi's sister
Drashi	Dungtso's brother

rashi disappointedly gave up persuading his sister, Dungtso. He left her tent and walked to his family's tent. He worried about Dungtso moving to the winter pasture alone, providing bandits the opportunity to steal her livestock. The year before, he had faced a great challenge in dealing with thieves who stole yaks from one of his neighbors.

Drashi entered his family tent, but decided to advise his sister again so walked back to her tent.

Dawa held a yak-hair cloth bag in front of his mother. He was ten-years-old and shorter and smaller than the bag. He stared at Dungtso as she folded some sheepskin robes, held them, and moved from the tent's right side to the left where Dawa was holding the bag. As she moved about, the hem of her sheepskin robe brushed the ground, stirring up little whirligigs of dust. Filling the bag with the robes, she tied the bag tightly with a yak-hair rope and rushed over to the left side of the tent to put pots and kettles in a yak-skin bag. She ignored Drashi, who had just re-entered the tent and sat cross-legged on the right side of the tent.

Drashi hesitated, thinking, "Should I persuade her again not to move now?"

Dungtso gazed at him wrathfully. Drashi swallowed, stood up, and paced inside the tent. He spoke to Dawa, who looked at his mother's angry face and said nothing. Drashi left the tent in exasperation.

A butter lamp-light illuminated the tent as Dawa and his mother were having supper. After a bowl of *zamba*, Dawa went to bed without speaking. He lay on a yak-hair mat on the right side of the tent, his head on the folded sheepskin robe he used for a pillow. Unable to sleep, he worried about moving to the winter pasture the next day. He thought, "Uncle Drashi is experienced so Mother should listen to him." He also worried that his mother would beat him if he disobeyed her. Scared of ruthless bandits who might kill people, he prayed to Buddha and chanted scriptures.

On this snowy morning, Dawa held a nose-ring rope and tried to keep the yak calm as his mother tied bags to the pack frame on its back. Anger burned in her heart as she cursed her brother for not coming to help pack the yaks. The yak seemed docile, so Dawa put his freezing fingers into his mouth to warm them.

The yak suddenly moved forward, stepping on Duntso's foot. Unable to bear the pain, she rushed into the tent. After a while, she came out holding a yak-leather rope. Dawa panicked, and tears trickled from his little round eyes when he saw the rope, imagining his mother would whip him.

Duntso mounted a white horse, ready to drive her family's livestock to the winter pasture. Dawa reluctantly rode a calm black, polled yak. His family's red, watchdog followed. Dawa observed his playmates chasing one another, throwing snowballs. He looked back at them, felt lonesome as his mates disappeared behind him, and sobbed quietly.

Duntso was proud of how she was heroically moving to the winter pasture and felt she was clever and compassionate when she saw her family's fifteen yaks grazing near a creek. She was sure that her family's yaks would soon fatten, providing her family with fat meat for winter. She was curious why her son, sitting quietly on the right side of the tent, seemed so unhappy and worried, "Will he be a coward like Drashi?"

The next morning, Dawa woke up, stretched, and yawned. Busy with rubbing his eyes, he noticed his mother's ashen face. He put his head under the cover, deliberately avoiding her. Realizing what had probably happened, he knew he could do nothing.

Duntso searched everywhere for her family's livestock. To her amazement, the thieves had even stolen the family's old sacred yak. She scolded herself, regretting her rash decision.

Dawa got up later, made lunch, and waited for Duntso's return. He took the kettle from the adobe stove, placed it on the ground, and impatiently rushed out of the tent to see if his mother was coming. When he eventually saw her in the far distance, he entered the tent and heated the tea.

Duntso only had two bowls of tea. Dawa was sure she had not found any of their livestock. Dawa felt sleepy after eating two bowls of *zamba* and lay down for a nap, his snores disturbing Duntso's tangled ruminations.

Three days later, other neighbors arrived, and their livestock scattered everywhere, creating a new world. Dogs barked at colts running near the creek. Duntso was embarrassed to see Drashi in the late evening. While his wife went to bring the family's yaks back home, Drashi stayed at home, caring for their three-year-old son. Duntso put her head down, unconsciously scratching it with her right hand. Sometimes she glanced at Drashi, trying to say something, but gave up and stuck out her tongue. Drashi respectfully offered her a dragon-decorated bowl of tea, which Duntso sipped and felt better. Smiling broadly, she said, "Dear brother, I am so bad! Our family's yaks are gone. Stolen!"

Drashi did not directly respond. He felt sorry for her and especially pitied Dawa.

Time passed. There was no news of the missing yaks. Dawa visited his neighbors and did not spend much time with his mother. Sometimes he did not return home at night. As time passed, some families did not welcome Dawa, so his hungry stomach rumbled the whole day.

One day, he visited Dorje, a hunter in his sixties, who realized Dawa was a brave, honest boy and was happy to enlist him as his assistant. Meanwhile, Dawa understood that Dorje was a hunter with years of experience, and by helping him, he could get fresh meat.


...

Darkness came, and it was hard to see far into the distance. Dawa put the hind leg of a deer on his shoulder, ignoring the blood soaking into his sheepskin robe. He was eager to see his mother and tried to move quickly, but the big piece of meat was too heavy for that.



17

THE LUCKY LEADER AND HIS SON

he leader had been lucky. When he was twenty, he was the only person who could read and write Tibetan in his community, explaining why he became the local leader, a position he occupied for years.

He had two cars. One was an old car he had bought five years after he started his government job. The other was an expensive vehicle he had recently purchased and valued more than any of his other possessions. When he drove it, he worried accidents might occur.

The leader had an only one child, a son, whom he dearly loved. The mother encouraged her son to enroll in school, but he resisted because his playmates did not attend school that year. As his mother insisted, the boy cried for a whole evening and fell ill.

His grandmother worried and scolded the boy's mother with, "School is a prison! I don't want my grandson to suffer there. Students escape from school because they starve, and teachers beat them like prisoners."

She knew that her son, the local leader, would not dare to overrule her. Meanwhile, the father thought he could arrange a job for his son when he grew up, thanks to his position.

The years passed. Most of the boy's peers attended school. He had no playmates except during school holidays, so he often played with his grandmother. Initially, he enjoyed being with her. When they tired, they rested near the family tent. The boy sat on his grandmother's lap and listened to her stories. Sometimes he nursed her, though her breasts were dry.

One evening, the grandmother piously chanted scriptures in front of some deity images. The boy worshipped next to his grandmother but soon grew bored. He impatiently waited for an hour, but she still chanted and worshipped devoutly. The boy picked up his grandmother's wooden cane and knocked her head with it. The grandmother finished chanting and angrily scolded, "Dretru 'Son of a ghost!'" and slapped him.

From that day on, the boy spent less time playing with his grandmother and increasingly missed his playmates. No longer satisfied with his grandmother, he yearned to attend school, especially after one of his peers told him that he could drive

a fancy car and become a government clerk after he finished school. Wanting to be a leader like his father and own an expensive car, the boy implored his father to let him attend school. His father finally agreed, but added, "Don't tell your grandmother!"

Three months later, the boy's best friend returned home from school. They played together the whole day, and the boy confided that he would attend school the next year. The boy's friend was ecstatic at the thought of being in school together. The boys jumped and leaped into the air. The grandmother was delighted to see her grandson so happy, kissed his forehead, and gently stroked his head with her gnarled, unsteady hands.

Unable to control himself, the boy revealed what his father had promised. Shocked, the grandmother glared at her son, gazed at her lovely grandson as tears trickled down her cheeks, and finally, scolded, "You're not a good father. You don't love your son. You want him to suffer in school. You are not my son if you send him to school!"

The father urged his mother many times to permit the boy to attend school, but she would not relent.

The father could thus not keep the promise he had made to his son, but assured, "If you don't attend school, I'll ensure you take my position when you are older."

Thinking he could drive a fancy car if he became a leader, the boy eventually agreed.

Twenty years passed. The son was now twenty-eight, and his father had just retired. Unfortunately, the county leaders chose another local leader. This could not be changed. The decision was obvious because the son was illiterate.


The son angrily wanted to complain but dared not. His father was mourning the death of his mother, who had passed away some months earlier.

18

THE SHEPHERD

Characters

Tsedon	Tsering's uncle
Tsekyi	Tsering's grandmother
Tsering	Tsekyi's grandson

sering was an impoverished, nine-year-old boy. A year earlier, he had lost his mother and was now cared for by his grandmother, Tsekyi. She was strict, very religious, and enjoyed sitting in the sun and recounting stories of legendary saints to Tsering. She was sure this would accumulate merit, and she imagined that her grandson might become a holy person if her stories of the saints influenced him.

Tsering seldom played with his fellows, preferring to listen to Tsekyi's glorious stories. His best friend was his grandmother until he began helping his uncle, Tsedon, a devoted shepherd.

The grandmother was proud of Tsering. Locals praised his honest, sincere personality. Tsedon often asked Tsering to help him tend his sheep. Tsering dreamed of becoming a wealthy shepherd.

During a blizzard, many livestock starved to death. Uncle Tsedon was so concerned about his sheep that he couldn't sleep at night. Unable to bear the sheep dying from starvation, he decided to drive them to where there was more forage. While preparing to move, he told Tsering to accompany him. Initially, reluctant to lose the chance of enjoying his grandmother's stories, he finally agreed.

When they reached the summer pasture in the late evening, the wind was blowing snow everywhere. Tsering put his hand over his mouth and stared at Uncle Tsedon, who was desperately pitching a small, black yak-hair tent, which the whistling wind pulled down more than once. Tsering's limbs were numb by the time his uncle finally got a fire going inside their metal stove. After a simple meal of tea and dry fried bread, they went to bed.

Tsering missed his grandmother. Uncle Tsedon's gloomy face and quiet personality depressed him. He felt even worse when he heard wolves howling, imagining lambs losing their mothers. Bleating lambs caught his sympathy, and he wanted to wake his uncle and help the lambs locate their mothers, but Uncle Tsedon

was snoring loudly, so he dared not disturb him. He begged Buddha to have mercy on the lambs and wiped his tears away while recalling his tragic past.

The next morning, Uncle Tsedon got up earlier than usual, made a fire in the stove, and boiled tea. Tsering pulled on his sheepskin robe and went out to pee. He was astonished to see something moving in a yak-hair bag near the tent. Thinking the bag had been full of yak dung for making a fire, he glanced at his uncle, who was busily catching some weak lambs. Tsering realized that lambs were bleating in the bag. Curious as to why Uncle Tsedon was putting living lambs in a bag, he asked, "Dear Uncle, why are you putting the lambs in the bag? Are they going to die?"

Uncle Tsedon did not reply for a bit and then said, "They all will die."

"It's a sin to kill them. Aren't you afraid of going to Hell after you die?" asked Tsering.

"Nobody wants to go to Hell. I can do nothing for them. They will all die soon. It's just a matter of time," his uncle said.

Tsering did not fully comprehend this, but he said no more.

They drove the sheep up a high mountain after breakfast. Tsedon asked Tsering to gather some branches and sweep the snow away from a place where they would sit. Tsedon held prayer beads in his right hand and piously chanted scriptures and mantras.

Tsering was eager to enjoy the amazing view of the snow-covered landscape, but the bright sunshine meant he could not see very far. He looked at Tsedon and wanted to chat, but did not, worrying he would sin if he disturbed his uncle's devout chanting. Curious to know how many lambs were in the flock, nibbling on dry grass below them, he stood on a big boulder and began counting. His math was poor, and every time he got a different number.

At noon, some ewes ran among the flock, searching for their lambs, bleating until they were hoarse. Tsering looked at them pitifully, stared at Uncle Tsedon, and asked, "Aren't the ewes pathetic?"

Uncle Tsedon slowly opened his eyes and responded, "If I don't kill the lambs, they will nurse their mothers, who are unable to eat much grass under this thick layer of snow. If the ewes nurse their lambs, they will weaken and die."

"Dear Uncle, we can feed the ewes some pieces of bread and *zamba* if they become weak."

"Boy, it's not so easy. I just put ten lambs in the bag. You probably don't know that some rich families make a big yak-dung box and throw hundreds of lambs inside during blizzards."

Tsering stuck out his tongue and stared at his uncle, thinking the most sinful person in the world was a shepherd.

He now wondered if he should be a shepherd after learning that the richest people in his community owned many sheep.

A couple of months passed. Cuckoos chirped on vigorously growing branches. Tsering chased rainbows after a light morning shower. Lambs leaped across small streams and, when Tsering disturbed them, they rushed to their mothers.

Many shepherds came to the summer pasture with their sheep. Tsering was no longer lonely. The shepherds competed in horseraces on the vast grassland, chatted about lovers, and laughed loudly. Sometimes they continued until dawn.

Two months passed. Tsering did not imagine time could pass so quickly. Deciding to herd their sheep elsewhere, they packed their yaks. Tsering was astonished when he saw the many sheep bones scattered around their campsite. As his eyes fixed on the shepherd's greasy faces, he realized just how sinful it was to become rich by herding.



19

A DAY

Characters

Sanggye

Tseko's biological father,
Tanggnye's adoptive father

Tanggnye

Sanggye's adopted son

Tseko

Sanggye's biological son



cold, snowy winter morning is silent, but for barking watchdogs. Father Sanggye sits, wearing his oily sheepskin robe without a sash, near the wood frame windows of his family's house. He stares at some cold, shivering sparrows searching for food. Father Sanggye is in his forties. His poor eyesight doesn't let him see very far into the distance. Two birds share their food under some bushes. They don't like the weather, but they enjoy their lives. As Father Sanggye observes the birds, he recalls his wife's death and looks away, his eyes brimming with grief.

Tseko is deeply asleep, snoring like a hog. Father Sanggye wants to wake him, but he does not because the weather is very cold. Meanwhile, Tanggnye takes a milk pail in his right hand and walks to the gate of the family's rectangular, adobe-wall courtyard. Snow covers his old, worn sheepskin robe. He worries the snow will melt. The lower part of his sheepskin will then dry and be stiff, chaffing his ankles and calves until they bleed.

About a half-hour later, Tanggnye makes a fire in their adobe stove and boils tea. He pours fresh milk into his father's red, wood bowl and hands his father a bowl with *zamba*.

Tseko doesn't want to get up and asks Tanggnye to give him breakfast. Tseko knows Tanggnye is genuinely kind to him and his father.

Tanggnye drives his family's yaks to the mountains after breakfast.

At lunchtime, Tanggnye doesn't return. Father Sanggye says to Tseko, "Don't eat now. Wait for Tanggnye and have lunch together."

Tseko is upset, but says nothing, knowing his father has a bad heart. He doesn't understand why his father loves Tanggnye so much and wonders why he doesn't tell Tanggnye about their true relationship.

In the early evening, Father Sanggye stays near the window, and rubs butter on Tanggnye's sheepskin robe, softening it. Tseko decides his father doesn't love him

very much and imagines marrying a girl and living in a community far away. Tseko unhappily goes outside. When he reenters the house, he sees Father Sanggye rubbing butter on his sheepskin robe to make it soft and feels remorseful.

Tanggnye drives the yaks into the yak enclosure and begins tethering the yaks. When Father Sanggye tells Tseko to help Tanggnye, Tseko asks, "Why should I help him? He's not my real brother. He's our family's servant."

Father Sanggye sadly realizes that one day, Tseko will tell Tanggnye about their true relationship.

After supper, Tseko sees his father's pale face and tired eyes. He knows his father's heart is very weak. Father Sanggye asks his two sons to come near. He takes a thread with an agate from around his neck and holds it. It is his own father's agate. He hands it to Tseko. Next, he pulls the red, wood bowl from out of his robe pouch and puts it in Tanggnye's hands.

Tseko is angry. He wants the bowl, too. Father Sanggye notices and says, "Tseko, after I die, please be kind to Tanggnye. Love him as I love you, even though he is not your biological brother."

Father Sanggye surprises himself, immediately covers his mouth with his right palm and stares at Tseko with wide-open, unblinking eyes. Tanggnye is astonished and tries to say something, but stops.

Tseko turns and smiles at Tanggnye, who now understands he is adopted.

Father Sanggye does not breathe.

The house is silent on this frigid winter night.

It begins to snow.



PART TWO: GOOD BOYS NEVER CRY

ACCLAIM

When we want to learn about a community of people, i.e., their life and culture, we frequently turn to documentary films and written accounts in academic and popular readings as sources of knowledge. In the case of Tibetans, it is more challenging to locate and access short stories, especially in English, to learn about the community and its history and people. *Good Boys Never Cry* by Gu ru 'phrin las perfectly exemplifies the fluidity, porousness, and interplay between fictional narratives and life stories. Although framed as fictional accounts, Gu ru informs us that these stories are inspired by his memories and observations of people and their lives in his home community and beyond.

Most of the selections in this anthology deliberately lead us into a calm, peaceful rural life, heightened by his up-close examination of quotidian, everyday details that were once familiar yet now removed from the author and potential Tibetan readers whose social reality continues to transform rapidly. The past held memorable fun moments the author must have felt in invoking nostalgia. He predicts and expects his potential readers to savor these moments as he does. Still, other stories narrate sorrow and pain in community life - death, violence, illness, poverty, feuding, divorce, compulsory education, unemployment, and gendered inequality. Who is to blame when Shangri-La is not all it seems to be? Who is to offer a verdict?

-Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རྡོ་རྗེ། Lanzhou University

Good Boys Never Cry illustrates the sourness, sweetness, bitterness, and spiciness of daily life in Amdo's pastoral hinterlands in its chronicling of life in a Tibetan community, spotlighting unique local realities. The Tibetan Plateau is renowned for its magnificent natural and cultural landscapes with an extreme climate challenging life, particularly for herders who spend much time outdoors. While livelihoods may seem as simple as tending, herding, selling, and slaughtering livestock, suffering is far more pronounced than in many elsewhere. Pastoral communities are marred by natural disasters, transportation accidents, tribal conflicts, honor fighting, alcoholism, illnesses, and tragedies. Women bear the bulk of all burdens, rising early to hobble and milk female yaks and to collect and dry fresh yak dung for cooking and heating fuel. Dreading rumors, they obey their parents in everything, enduring the abuse of drunken spouses, the stigma of tradition, lovers' betrayals, the burden of fatherless children, arranged marriages, undesired divorce, and unequal relationships. Today, as the stories show, traditional communities are altering, and tribal bonds are on the verge of shattering. People are engulfed in an ocean of information bombarded by TikTok livestreams and instant messaging applications such as WeChat. These new technologies facilitate novel patterns of romantic relationships and behaviors of youth born and raised in traditional pastoral communities but educated in China's major cities, where they speak Chinese, frequent gyms and cafés like city boys and girls, and watch *Game of Thrones* on their tablets. Gu ru 'phrin las' *Good Boys Never Cry* is a must-read of an enthralling constellation of diverse stories defying a single theme.

-Nyangchakja (སྐལ་ལྷགས་ཀྱེ། Snying lcags rgyal) SOAS University of London

Good Boys Never Cry, Gu ru 'phrin las' much-awaited sequel to *Remembering Tomorrow*, is a valuable contribution to better understanding Tibetan life focused on first-hand accounts and personal life stories of various narrators. Revealing complex nomad community life and local patterns of thought and behavior, it succeeds magnificently in revealing aspects of communal living that have remained intact for over a millennium and are now undergoing dramatic changes amid the rapid social and economic changes characterizing China. Essential reading in Tibetan Studies, Himalayan Anthropology, and Women's Studies.

-Dpal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྷན་བཟླ་ཤིས། *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*

Good Boys Never Cry is a collection of detailed, intimately observed narratives informed by Gu ru 'phrin las' life in an Amdo Tibetan pastoral setting - and beyond. Morality, integrity, and betrayal are emphasized in multiple stories, as are gender differences, domestic violence, and complex childrearing environments. Indispensable reading for better understanding Tibetan life and culture, particularly during rapid cultural and social transitions.

-Sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱལ་བཟླ་ཤིས། *University of Colorado Boulder*

Gu ru 'phrin las' *Good Boys Never Cry* is a valuable, intensely informed collection of stories providing readers with rare insight into the actualities of Tibetan herding life and challenges encountered in experiencing modern formal education in metropolitan environments. This life becomes very real with yak enclosures, hobbling yaks, milking, riding horses and yaks, driving yaks out of family enclosures into the mountains in the morning and back in the evening, collecting fresh yak dung, children and their games, husbands maltreating wives, women's low social status, marriages, births, child-raising, love, theft, animosity and quarrels between tribes, clothing, religion, folk songs, daily life, the Plateau climate, flowers, birds, animals, and herders moving camps. Requisite reading for learning more about life on the Plateau.

-Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春) *Qinghai University Affiliated Hospital*

Good Boys Never Cry, a collection of twenty-one attention-grabbing stories reflecting Tibetan pastoral life, captures traditional and modern intersections and their consequences in Tibetan society. Born and raised in a traditional Plateau pastoral family, Gu ru phrin las' formal education and lived experiences amid powerful social and cultural transformations sharpen observations and reflections on his community's changes and conflicts. Tibetan women's social status and roles and the changes in education and employment in towns and cities are central to several stories, suggesting that well-educated and financially independent Tibetan women have more control over their lives.

The stories portray richly detailed traditional herding life illustrating social hierarchy; concepts of family and family structure; marriage systems; child-raising; expressions of affection and discipline; and values of kindness, loyalty, and diligence before transitioning to

modernization and the multiplicity of all that it brings to pastoral communities with changes and challenges, e.g., brick houses in towns and fabric tents replacing yak-hair tents, choosing the monkhood or public schools for sons, and so on.

Gu ru begins with "A Pregnant Boy," reflecting the early childhood of a grandfather in his eighties, who often recounts memories of early times, including a period of extreme malnutrition (explaining the title). In vividly bringing locals' historical recollections to contemporary life, this narrative illustrates cultural ties between the past and present, creating a shared understanding between generations.

The collection ends with "The Painting," presented as a script focusing on a Tibetan female university student pursuing an art degree in painting and her turbulent, tentative romantic liaisons.

Reading *Good Boys Never Cry* with Guru's earlier *Remembering Tomorrow* is a splendid, at times unsettling overview of Plateau pastoral life and the interior worlds of those who live there. Highly recommended.

-Lhamodrolma ལྷོ་མོ་རྒྱལ་མ།

Good Boys Never Cry reflects Gu ru 'phrin las' observations, experiences, and creative literary energies. An important voice from the pastoral community in which he was born and reared, twenty-one narratives offer authentic, vibrant links to Tibetan pastoral life in its joys, sorrows, and turbulent transitions during the early twenty-first century, enriching the contemporary Himalayan story-scape.

-Tshe dpal rdo rje ཚེ་དཔལ་རྡོ་རྗེ། Qinghai Minzu University

Good Boys Never Cry, Gu ru 'phrin las' second collection of narratives, presents stories depicting many aspects of my life because, in part, we are from the same region and share the same natal culture. Splash marks on the narrator's sister's robe from fetching Yellow River water, telling folktales and deciphering riddles, a child born and placed on dried sheepskin, catching birds with a plastic basin propped up by a string tied to a short stick, using wool ash to stop bleeding from a dog bite, and a lottery system to select children to attend school all resonate powerfully with my childhood memories. As time in the stories progresses chronologically, nomads become small-town residents, e.g., one drives a secondhand blue ISUZU truck instead of riding yaks and horses, and confusion over identity - nomad or town worker? Such details transport me to my past, remind me of the present, and lead to profound contemplation of the future. This important text of authentic Tibetan pastoral life and its challenges and uncertain future in the twenty-first century is indispensable reading.

-Rig grol རིག་གྲོ། Qinghai Normal University

Good Boys Never Cry is the second collection of short stories (plus one script) by young Tibetan writer Gu ru 'phrin las. *Remembering Tomorrow*, his first book, narrates the lives and memories of older Tibetans, such as his parents and grandmother. *Good Boys Never Cry*

features the lives of young Tibetans in China, some told in the first person, living in pastoral areas and beyond in about 2010. Importantly, local natural disasters such as flooding and social issues related to abuse, rumors, and misjudgments offer valuable raw materials to those interested in Tibetan culture and social studies.

-Tshe dbang rdo rje ཅེ་དབང་རྡོ་རྗེ། (Caixiangduojie 才项多杰) Qinghai Normal University

Gu ru 'phrin las' life experiences provide plentiful resources to write about Tibetan herders' life. *Good Boys Never Cry*, his second collection of stories (after *Remembering Tomorrow*), uses plain but vivid language to describe the daily lives of ordinary men, women, and children on the Plateau and rich ethnographic information. Nomad yak tents, grassland childhoods, herding yaks and sheep, maturing, romance, marriage and responsibilities, disputes over grasslands, and more, form a permanent context for the author. In this new collection, he also includes stories of individual herders abandoning traditional pastoral lives and attempting to make a living in towns and young Tibetans attending universities in cities. Between the lines, readers feel the author's nostalgia for childhood life and concern about urbanization that brings inevitable change to the distinct culture that nourishes him. This wonderful book is an important resource for understanding Tibetans experiencing rapid change.

-Kelsang Norbu (Gesang Nuobu, Skäl bzang nor bu ཀེ་སང་ནོ་བུ།)

Guru 'phrin las writes brilliantly from the perspective of a local observer and participant in Tibetan traditional pastoral family life increasingly influenced by modernity. On the surface, it is painful to read about nomadic families in the Mgo log Tibetan area. At a deeper level, readers are confronted with choices and fates the stories' characters must confront, strengthening and broadening perspectives on the realities of traditional pastoral families transitioning to more modern lifestyles.

-Li Jianfu 李建富 (Libu Lakhi, Zla ba bstan 'dzin ལྷ་བ་བསྐྱེད་འཛོལ།) Qinghai Normal University

Good Boys Never Cry is a continuation of unfinished accounts in Gu ru 'phrin las' *Remembering Tomorrow*. I strongly recommend reading both books together since the focus is on a nostalgic memory of Tibetan nomadic life's recent past. Arguably, authentic nomadic life on the Tibetan Plateau and elsewhere is diminishing fast since settled life has gradually become a new "lifestyle" for nomads. Questions now become: If nomadic life, often embodying idealized Tibetan mobility, freedom, spirituality, happiness, and masculinity, withdraws from the historical stage, what will the "Tibetan spirit" be? What will make Tibetans Tibetan? If social change is inevitable in pastoral and Tibetan regions, what are the chances of Tibetan cultural continuity? These questions weigh heavily on the minds of many Tibetans and, possibly, the author's mind.

The last two decades have witnessed growing anxieties about Tibetan culture survival and continuity in various sectors of Tibetan society (nomads, peasants, monks/lamas, intellectuals, cadres, businesspeople, college students, and so on). This explains burgeoning "ordinary" Tibetan memory projects centered on an irreversible past and nostalgic sentiments during this period. I say "ordinary" Tibetan memory because (auto-)biographical writing is no longer limited to the elites (religious and political figures), as found in the Tibetan literary tradition of namtar or sacred biography. *Good Boys Never Cry* and *Remembering Tomorrow* exemplify "ordinary" Tibetan memory. With this context in mind, readers may gain fresh or different perspectives on the messages conveyed in the books and their significance.

-Tenzin Jinba བཟླ་ན་འཛིན་ཕྱིན་པ། *National University of Singapore*

20

A BAD, UNKIND MAN?

Dorje went to Chongqing the summer he was twenty. He enjoyed traveling alone, and Chongqing was famous for hotpot, his favorite food, so he came to the city. However, the weather was so hot that he spent most of the daytime in his hotel room, emerging only at night to have hotpot. After dinner each evening, he visited famous tourist night scenes, where buildings and bridges were lit up with colorful lights. He would spend around thirty minutes at each site, but the press of large crowds made him so uncomfortable that he would soon head back to his hotel.

On his third day in the city, he went out during the day to shop. He walked to a busy street some distance from his hotel and bought a white shirt and a white pair of pants after two hours of browsing. Tired, he called a taxi and returned to his hotel. Once inside his room, he pulled the curtains to darken the room, plopped on the bed, and slept for an hour.

Upon waking, he rolled over and watched entertaining videos on TikTok that occasionally made him chuckle. Suddenly the desk telephone sputtered. Ignoring the phone, he sat up, put his cellphone on the bed, exchanged his pants for a pair of black shorts, slipped on the white shirt he had bought earlier in the day, and slid his feet into the white slippers that featured the hotel's name in Chinese characters.

A few minutes later, his doorbell rang. He walked casually to the door and opened it. A delivery man clad in a yellow raincoat hurriedly handed him a plastic bag, apologizing, "Sorry! Your food is probably cold. It's raining, so I couldn't drive my scooter very fast."

Dorje saw raindrops trickling down the man's raincoat and his black Li Ning sports shoes squished with water. He took the bag saying, "It's okay."

Dorje put the food on the table next to his hotel room's window and sat on a chair. He removed the food, a plastic spoon, and a pair of chopsticks from the plastic bag. Next, he opened the disposable plastic food container. It wasn't what he had ordered. He picked up his phone and checked the Meituan app. Rice with chicken and potatoes had been delivered, but that was not what he had ordered. He visited the restaurant's main page and checked the prices of noodles with chicken and potatoes compared to rice with chicken and potatoes. The latter was three RMB cheaper, so he called the restaurant.

"Hello!" a woman answered.

"I ordered noodles with chicken and potatoes, but I got rice with chicken and

potatoes. What happened?"

"I'm sorry. I was busy, so my son checked the order on the phone. He told me the order was rice with chicken and potatoes."

"But I ordered noodles with chicken and potatoes. What should I do?"

"Where are you? Are you far from my restaurant?"

"Yes. I'm far from your place."

"Apply for a refund. I'll return your money."

"Okay. What should I do with the food?"

The woman hung up without answering, so he applied for a refund.

After a few minutes, he got a confirmation message that the money had been refunded. So, he picked up the spoon from the table, had a scoop of the chicken and rice, stopped, put the lid back on the container, and called the restaurant.

"Hello!" the woman answered.

"I can't throw the food away. I'm going to eat it. Add my WeChat, and I'll send you the money for the food."

"It's okay. You can have the food for free."

"But I should pay you."

"We're homies. When you called me, the characters for Qinghai appeared on my phone screen. You have the food. It's my treat."

"But I insist. I should pay you since I'm going to eat the food."

"It's okay. Order food from my restaurant next time."

"Thanks. I'll do that for sure."

After eating, he lay back on the bed and stared at the ceiling. He knew it was unfair not to pay for the food.

He was still awake and still troubled by the matter at two AM. He rolled over in bed and thought, "That restaurant woman is a young mother who probably came to this city to send her son to a good school. She makes a living by running a restaurant. It's not easy for her. It's wrong of me to have her food without paying," so he decided to find the restaurant the next day using his iPhone's internet map and pay for the meal.

...

A few years earlier, when Dorje was eighteen and in his first year of high school in the local prefecture town, his home community's neighbors and relatives had admired him. Few students from his community had ever attended high school. He was also respectful, religious, and kind to everyone. So, he was widely liked and considered to be good and kind.

One morning, Dorje was awakened by his father chanting scriptures loudly in the family's shrine room. He poured water into seven small silver bowls on a table in front of images of deities and well-known local religious personalities. His father lit a butter lamp, put his palms together and touched them to his forehead. Closing his eyes, he intoned, "May every living being be released from the realms of suffering."

Coming into the living room, his father asked him to get up from where he slept near the shrine room door.

Dorje and his father sat on one side of the living room while his sister and mother sat opposite. His sister handed him a bowl of noodles asking him to pass it to his father. She next handed another bowl of noodles to Dorje. After that, they ate breakfast and chatted.

Dorje's mother spoke, "We know who stole our family yak."

Dorje stopped eating, "Who?"

His father said, "Forget it."

Dorje insisted, "Who is the thief?"

His mother said, "He's from our tribe, his family is poor, and he has a sick son. Don't make trouble."

His father added, "Forget it. What a poor thief! His wife died a few days ago."

Sympathy rippled across Dorje's face as he agreed with his parents and never again asked about the thief.

...

When Dorje turned twenty-four, he graduated from the provincial university, where he majored in chemistry. He didn't return home after graduation, though most of his classmates did and sat an exam for government jobs. Those who passed worked for the local government. Those who didn't pass and whose relatives knew some leaders and could leverage some influence became temporary teachers or government clerks.

Wanting to go into business, Dorje went to Shenzhen for a two-month pastry-making and fruit juice drink program one of his friends had recommended. There, he made friends with Jiangjiang, who had also joined the training program. Their friendship started when he noticed she often had lunch and supper alone in a restaurant near their program building. The only person he had seen her with was a stylishly dressed, short, plump woman. Walking past an ice cream shop, he glanced through its sizeable sidewalk-facing window where they were seated, eating ice cream.

One noon, Dorje came to the restaurant where Jiangjiang often ate. The restaurant was crammed with customers, testimony to its good food. He ordered a bowl of beef noodles and looked for a place to sit. There were no empty tables, but he noticed Jiangjiang eating a bowl of noodles in a corner by herself, so he walked over and sat at her table.

She knew he was Tibetan and was curious about his life. "Does your family herd yaks and sheep?"

"My family has yaks but no sheep. My father herded sheep but sold them all a few years ago."

"Can you herd yaks?"

"Yes. I can herd yaks."

"Can you ride a horse?"

"I rode a horse by myself first when I was six."

"Wow! You're amazing. I want to ride a horse if I visit your place. But I'm afraid to ride horses."

"No need to be scared. Riding horses are tame and gentle."

"Okay. Does your family live in a tent?"

"My family lives in a house in winter and spring and a tent during summer and autumn."

"Okay. Are you a Buddhist?"

"People from my community are all Buddhists."

She wanted to ask another question, but the waitress interrupted, placing a bowl of noodles in front of Dorje and handing him a pair of chopsticks.

Dorje started eating. Jiangjiang let him eat without saying much. After he finished, she resumed her questioning.

They became friends.

She invited Dorje to a small bar where they occupied a table next to a window one night. There were few customers. Two men sat at a table near the entrance, and three women were at the table next to them. It was quiet except for recorded music on the sound system. A waitress brought over four bottles of beer and two glasses. Dorje opened a bottle with the cheap metal bottle opener provided by the bar and filled the glasses.

Jiangjiang thought for a while and, after a little bit, said, "You're lucky. Your parents live together. You care about your parents, and they care about you."

He didn't know what to say but nodded. Jiangjiang continued, "My father owns a factory in this city, which produces shirts, coats, and pants. He came home during the New Year and spent only one or two days with the family. Every time before leaving home, he would promise to return home soon and spend time with me, but he never did. I have never experienced my father's love. My mother is a junior middle school history teacher. Her salary supported our living expenses. She cared for me when I got sick. She was disappointed by my father's absence when we needed his help, so she decided to divorce him when I turned thirteen."

Dorje didn't know what to say and continued sipping his beer.

"Two months later, he remarried a beautiful woman six years his junior. They had a two-year-old son at the time of the wedding. My father had betrayed and cheated on my mother for years."

Dorje asked, "Did your mother remarry?"

"No. She says she will not. I hope she doesn't. We share companionship. We are generally happy together, even though she disapproves of my masculine behavior."

He asked, "How often do you meet up with your father?"

"Once or twice a year."

He gulped a mouthful of beer and observed her. She wore a white Adidas shirt and had a silver Apple watch on her right wrist. Her short pitch-black hair was parted on the right side, combed straight back, and held in place by hair spray. The hair on

each side of her head was much shorter than the hair on top of her head. It was a very masculine hairdo. Those who saw her the first time would not have immediately known she was female, although her bulging breasts soon confirmed this.

Dorje continued, "Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No. I'm not interested in men."

He nodded, looked at her, and suddenly realized they had finished ten bottles of beer and that she was drunk. Jiangjiang swayed slightly from side to side in her armchair. It was time to leave. He stood and suggested they go. She wanted to drink more but reluctantly followed him out of the bar.

Dorje hailed a taxi and gestured for Jiangjiang to get in. After giving the driver Jiangjiang's mother's address and saying goodbye, he stopped another taxi and went to his hotel near the building where he had classes.

When Jiangjiang suggested jointly running a cake shop in Shenzhen a few weeks later, he readily agreed. She was a local, so renting a small shop space for 9,000 RMB a month was easy to arrange. They also spent 5,000 RMB on pastry-making equipment, shop decorations, and remodeling. Dorje was ashamed to ask his parents for money, so he borrowed 10,000 RMB from a wealthy friend.

They arranged the cake mixers, oven, and juice machines on one side of the small, narrow shop space. The other side of the room had a place to wash and prepare fruit and store pastry ingredients. Near the door was a cashier's table, and further inside, there was an enclosed refrigerated glass display case where cakes and pastries of different sizes and colors could be displayed. Selling drinks would add to their customer base and income. There was no room for tables, so they put several metal stools near the entrance for customers who wanted to drink and eat their purchases in the shop.

The shop was far from Jiangjiang's home, so she suggested she and Dorje share an apartment just a ten-minute walk from the shop. The apartment had two bedrooms, one toilet, a living room, a tiny but functional kitchen, and a small balcony. Jiangjiang slept in the bedroom with the balcony. Dorje slept in the other bedroom. The rent was 3,000 RMB a month. The electricity, water, and air conditioning cost an additional 300 RMB monthly.

Initially, business was good. They both worked long days, from nine AM to ten PM. Later, when more fruit drink and cake shops opened along the same street where their shop was located, the number of customers declined, so they worked on alternate days. Later, they offered online services on the Meituan delivery app, which increased their revenue.

There was no romantic interest between Dorje and Jiangjiang, who walked and dressed much like a man. Instead, they were happy to live together as friends.

One night, Dorje arrived at the apartment to discover a young woman wearing expensive, fashionable clothing sitting on the sofa in the living room, smoking a cigarette. She smiled, crushed the cigarette in a black plastic ashtray on the table before her, entered Jiangjiang's bedroom, and closed the door without a

word to Dorje, who went to his bedroom.

Soon afterward, this friend began working in the shop with Jiangjiang and generally hung out with her. She was often in their shared apartment and slept in Jiangjiang's bedroom. Dorje asked no questions and never commented on their relationship.

One day, Jiangjiang informed Dorje that she and the young woman wanted to share an apartment. She and the young woman moved Jiangjiang's belongings to their new apartment. They seemed excited and happy to live together. He remembered once that Jiangjiang told him, "It doesn't matter who you live with; what matters is living happily with them. Trust, loyalty, being comfortable with each other, and being together are important."

...

One day when Dorje was making lemon juice, a woman phoned and said, "I wanted no sugar in my lemon drink, but you added a lot of sugar. I can't drink it. I'm going to apply for a refund," and ended the call.

Dorje approved the fifteen RMB reimbursement, sending the money back to the customer's Meituan account.

He resumed making more drinks, reminding himself to carefully check Meituan orders, especially to see if sugar or no sugar had been cheated.

A delivery worker arrived and said, "Meituan Eighteen?"

Dorje put a plastic cup of lemon drink into a small plastic bag and handed it to the man.

Thirty minutes later, Dorje's phone rang again. "I ordered milk tea. I got lemon juice. What should I do? Last time you made the same mistake, but I said nothing," a woman complained.

Dorje apologized, "Sorry. Please accept the lemon juice for free. I'll send milk tea now."

The woman declared, "I'm going to apply for a refund," and ended the call.

He slapped his palm on the table and noticed a plastic cup full of milk tea on the table. "What's wrong with my brain?" he scolded himself. He accepted the customer's refund request and returned the money to her account. He also had to reimburse fifteen RMB for the lemon juice.

That night back in his apartment, he was upset and angry. As he sat on the couch in the living room, he lit a cigarette. Inhaling, he realized he was to blame - not the customers. He leaned against the back of the couch, stared at the ceiling, and then went to bed.

A year later, he calculated his monthly income and expenses. He was making very little money, so he returned home and operated a cake shop in his county town.

Jiangjiang understood and accepted his decision.

...

Dorje, now twenty-six, was running a cake shop in the county town. He decided to visit his parents one morning and borrowed his cousin's car. He drove to the family's

black yak-hair tent pitched at the foot of a tall mountain near a small river. Once there, he lay on his back on the grass near his family's tent and stretched out his arms and legs while gazing at flocks of clouds moving gently across the blue sky. A breeze perfumed by the many flowers surrounded him. He closed his eyes and listened to birds chirping and water flowing nearby. He felt free and extremely calm. "What a place!" he thought.

After a bit, his parents and sister appeared, driving the family's yaks from a small hill near the tent. His father and mother shouted to the yaks, making them walk faster. His sister was a senior high school student now on summer vacation. He raised his head, looked at them, and went to help. They tethered the milk yaks and calves and drove the other yaks into a metal-fenced enclosure a hundred meters from the tent.

That night, a solar-powered light bulb shone from the top of the tent, brightening everything inside.

Dorje's mother's gold and silver rings and coral necklaces were packed in a wooden box. Another wooden box contained religious books, images, and antique porcelain bowls inherited from Dorje's grandparents. The boxes were secured with small locks. Some bags of blankets bought from the local town and wool blankets made by Dorje's parents were reserved for monk guests. His family annually invited monks from the local monastery to chant scriptures to expel evils, bring good fortune to the family, prevent family members from becoming ill, and protect livestock from disease. All these boxes and bags were stacked at the back of the tent. A wooden table was in front of the stack. Images of deities and local high-ranking religious figures were displayed on the table with a flickering butter lamp.

An adobe stove his mother had made stood in the center of the tent dividing it into two parts. A collapsible metal cot with kitchen items stood on one side and a milk separator was on the other side. A small, square adobe box was near the stove with bowls, chopsticks, and various flavor enhancers - soy sauce, vinegar, MSG, prickly ash, chili flakes, and fragrant oils in glass and plastic containers. Blankets and robes were folded and piled along one side of the tent.

His mother and sister cooked rice and fried cabbage with beef. Dorje and his father sat on one side of the tent, and his mother and sister sat opposite. They ate dinner and chatted.

Dorje began a conversation with his parents, "Next year, we should sell our family's yaks. You are old and can no longer easily herd yaks. We can buy a house in the township town where you can live."

With little enthusiasm, his mother replied, "We can herd yaks until your sister graduates from university. This will finance her study."

Dorje protested, "It will take years before she graduates. Herding is tough work, and you both aren't getting younger. You can't herd yaks forever."

His mother replied firmly, "I can herd yaks until I can't herd yaks. Herding yaks is not a hardship. I make a living for my family by herding yaks."

Dorje was touched by what his mother said and did not reply.

His father asked, "What will we do if we stop herding yaks?"

"Move to town and enjoy life," suggested Dorje.

At this point, his sister interjected, "Yes, life is short. Why should your life end herding yaks?"

His father continued, "Herders move to the township town where some run small shops. Some become street sweepers. They can't make enough to support their families. Some have no job and end up feeling useless, bored, and worried about making a living. At least we are busy herding and, somehow, we enjoy this life. At least, we don't worry about basic subsistence."

Realizing his parents were well aware of their life options, Dorje could see their decision was reasonable and their lifestyle suitable for the time being. He changed the topic, and they continued chatting.

Before bed, Dorje and his father went out to answer nature's call. His mother and sister waited for their turn and went out when the men returned to the tent. There was no toilet.

Back inside the tent, Dorje and his father slept on one side, with Dorje sleeping on the cot. He had urged his father to take the cot, but he had refused, insisting that he sleep on a mat next to his son. Two blankets covered Dorje while his father was wrapped in his robe and another blanket.

His mother and sister slept on mats on the left side of the tent, his sister in two blankets, and his mother in two of her robes.

The next day, Dorje drove his cousin's car to the township town and parked near the Golden Valley Restaurant. He went inside and ordered a plate of fried rice with small chunks of beef and some chopped vegetables. While eating, he heard glass shatter, got up, and walked outside. A window of his cousin's car had been smashed. A young man holding a beer bottle in his right hand leaned against the car. Dorje rushed over, grabbed the young man's shoulder, and demanded, "Why did you break my window?"

The young man pushed Dorje away, declaring, "I didn't break it."

Dorje knew the man was drunk and called the police.

The young man threw the beer bottle away when he saw a police car approaching. The police car parked at the restaurant, and two policemen got out. One asked Dorje, "What's the problem?"

"This guy broke my car window!"

The police looked at the young man and, realizing he was from Dorje's tribe, said, "You two are from the same tribe. Work this out. We'll deal with it if you can't reach an agreement."

Dorje assented, and they left.

Dorje said to the young man, "You broke the window, so you should pay 300 RMB."

The young man said, "Sorry. I thought the car was my ex-girlfriend's

boyfriend's car. He drives a car exactly like this. My ex-girlfriend betrayed me. She had an affair with her current boyfriend while we were still together!"

"Give me 300 RMB."

"Sorry, I don't have the money."

"Why did you break the car window if you don't have money to fix it? Don't you know you must take responsibility if you destroy other people's property? I'll call the police if you don't give me 300 RBM."

"Go ahead. Call the police. I don't have any money."

"You had money to buy beer. Why don't you have money to compensate me? Don't play smart."


As Dorje took his phone from his pants pocket, bystanders urged Dorje to forgive him and not call the police, knowing the police would arrest him. Dorje called anyway.

A few minutes later, the two policemen returned, ordered the young man to get in their car, and drove off to the local police station. The bystanders watched as Dorje followed in his cousin's car.

Later the locals talked to each other, saying Dorje was not a good, kind man and agreed they didn't like him.

21

A GOOD BOY

hamo lay in bed under a white blanket decorated with red flowers. The Tibetan doctor sitting by the bed asked for her right wrist. He pressed four right-hand fingers against the veins and closed his eyes. After a couple of minutes, he released her wrist, touched her forehead with his palm, carefully looked at Lhamo's face, and sighed while Lhamo kept her head averted.

The doctor selected a plastic bag of pills from a white metal medical kit. He adjusted his round lensed glasses over his prominent nose and read the lettering on the bag to ensure they were the proper medication. He handed the bag to Lhamo's father, Wanbo, and said, "Be sure she takes two pills after every meal. Hopefully, it will lower her temperature."

Wanbo nodded, bowed to the doctor in appreciation, and took the bag.

"It would be best to take her to a first-class hospital," the doctor suggested.

"Is it a cold?" Wanbo asked.

The doctor stared at Lhamo's pale face, flushed cheeks, and dry lips. Lines of sadness momentarily creased his shiny, round face. He felt sorry that he could only offer pills. Gesturing to Wanbo, the two men went outside, closing the door behind them. "It's a severe problem. Take her to a good hospital as soon as possible," the doctor urged. "I'm sorry that I can't help her."

Wanbo nodded and said, "Yes. Thanks for coming and examining her." He pulled a wallet from his jacket pocket and handed a hundred RMB bill to the doctor.

The doctor refused the payment, mounted his motorcycle, and sped off.

...

Wanbo's wife, Lhadron, was conscious of her daughter's sorrowful face as she poured lukewarm water into a glass next to Lhamo's pillow. Ignoring the doctor's instructions, she handed two pills to Lhamo, hoping they would immediately relieve her pain, and then went outside to see what Wanbo was doing.

...

Lhadron had worked as a street sweeper after her family moved to the local township town three years earlier. Clad in a street sweeper uniform that she rarely changed, she had swept the town's streets every morning, Monday to Friday, for three years with her workmates. She stood next to Wanbo and said nothing for a few moments. Glancing at her husband, tears coursed down her cheeks as she said sorrowfully, "She's our only child and just twenty-two. We should do whatever we can to help her."

Wanbo reacted by walking into their simple one-story adobe house that featured a living room with two windows and a bedroom with one window. Lhadron followed.

Beads of sweat gathered on Lhamo's forehead, and her face turned white as she tried, unsuccessfully, to turn on her side in bed. She could not summon the strength.

Unable to bear seeing his daughter in such pain, Wanbo picked up a key from a table near the metal stove in the room where the family lived, ate, and slept and rushed outside to his blue ISUZU truck that he had bought secondhand four years earlier from a friend. He had made some money transporting flour, barley, and field corn for the locals from the county and the township towns to the local tribal settlements. However, his income had steadily declined as the truck's mechanical problems increased, requiring expensive repairs.

He turned the key in the ignition, but the engine didn't start. After several unsuccessful attempts, he pounded the steering wheel in frustration. He repeatedly opened the right door, lifted the driver's seat, and fiddled with the engine. Finally, the truck started. He drove twenty kilometers to where his cousin, Tsonko, lived. He had lent Wanbo money when he needed it, never asking for it to be repaid by a specific date. He knew Wanbo would repay the debt when he had the money.

As Wanbo parked his truck near the house, Tsonko's wife, Lhaki, warmly greeted Wanbo and escorted him into the family house, where she immediately offered him a bowl of tea. Sitting in an armchair, Wanbo took the bowl, sipped the tea, and placed the bowl on a small square wooden side table. Lhaki brought fried bread in a red plastic basin, set it on the table, and encouraged Wanbo to have some.

"Sure," Wanbo said, but he ate nothing.

"Where's Tsonko?"

"He and our son, Drashi, went to visit his sworn-brother, Dorje. They'll be back home tomorrow morning."

"Are you sure they'll not return today?"

"I'm sure. They'll come back tomorrow."

"Does Dorje live far from here?"

"It's far."

"Does Dorje's winter pasture have a phone signal?"

"No. We also don't have a phone signal. Have tea and some bread! How's life in the township town?"

"Not good."

"We herders admire you and others who have moved from herding areas and now live in the township town. You no longer need to herd livestock on rainy and snowy days. Instead, you operate shops and restaurants and make money without physical hardship. You know how tough the herding life is!"

Wanbo didn't agree but had no time to argue, "Yeah, sort of like that. I'm in a rush. I have to go."

"You didn't eat any bread. You should have some!"

"No, thanks! I've really got to go. My daughter's seriously ill," Wanbo declared and walked to the door.

"What's wrong with her?"

"The doctor didn't say exactly, but he said it's severe, so we must take her to a good hospital."

Lhaki said nothing as sympathy rippled across her face. She was sure Wanbo had come to borrow money. It was the only time he visited.

Lhaki walked with Wanbo to his truck and said, "I'll tell Tsonko you visited when he returns."

A short, strong man in his fifties wearing a black fabric robe had parked his motorcycle on the left side of the road and now stood in the center. A long sword hung from his red sash over his right thigh, and a black scarf covered his head.

Wanbo stopped his truck when he got near the man, who raised his right hand and waggled his fingers in a half-wave. He rolled down his window. The man grabbed the truck mirror and asked, "Wanbo, where are you going?"

Recognizing the voice, Wanbo said, "Delo! I'm going home. I thought you were a bandit! What are you doing here? I didn't recognize you until you spoke."

"I went to your home. Your wife told me you had gone to visit your cousin."

"Yeah. What brings you here?"

"I've got some quick business for you."

"I'm sorry. I'm in a hurry and have no time for business."

"It'll take very little of your time. You're going home, so it will be easy for you."

"What's the business?"

"I'll give you 2,000 RMB if you transport thirty bags of dried yak dung from nearby to a house in town."

"How far away are the bags?"

"About ten kilometers."

Wanbo checked his wristwatch. It was two PM.

Although 2,000 RMB wasn't enough to take Lhamo to a good hospital in the city, it would help, and he had the time, so he agreed.

Delo drove his motorcycle fast into a valley. Wanbo followed, worried he'd lose sight of Delo. There were many potholes and stones on the road. Delo wove around the rocks as Wanbo clutched the steering wheel and pressed his upper front teeth against his lower lip, worrying a tire would blow.

As they drove along a frozen river deep into the valley, Wanbo wondered where Delo was leading him. Local community households had moved to their winter pastures a month earlier. He had assumed no one was still here in the summer pasture.

Ten years earlier, Delo had ridden a red horse with a white spot on its forehead to the local township town to buy liquor. Four days earlier, he had bought ten half-liter bottles of liquor, which he had drunk all by himself in a three-day binge.

Delo had seen a horse rider coming toward him on a snowy day. Delo carefully wrapped his head in his black scarf, stopping his own horse, leaving only his eyes uncovered.

The young rider was now very near him. He had long hair, big eyes, and a straight nose. Delo had seen him in the local town but had never spoken to him. He was sure he was not from his home community. The young man was thin, short, and wore an attractive Tibetan robe and polished leather boots.

Delo pulled a black plastic pistol from his robe pouch, pointed it at the young man, and threatened, "Do you want your money or your life?"

"What?!" the young man gasped.

Delo pointed the gun at the young man's forehead and said, "Your money or your life? Choose!"

The young man fumbled a brown wallet from his robe pouch and handed it to Delo with an unsteady hand. Delo grabbed it, checked inside, stuffed the wallet and gun in his robe pouch, and silently rode off.

The local town had a few shops and restaurants, a police station, and a primary boarding school. A few parked cars and motorcycles were parked here and there. Delo tied his horse to a pole near the shop where he regularly bought liquor on credit. The shopkeeper agreed to this arrangement because Delo was the only customer who regularly purchased liquor from his shop.

As soon as Delo entered the shop, the proprietor demanded, "Pay what you owe me!"

Delo smiled, "Patience! A real man honors his promises. I won't steal from you!"

He reached into his robe pouch, pulled out 500 RMB, flourished it, and proudly exclaimed, "A man with no money yesterday has money today!" handing over 200 RMB and ordering ten bottles of liquor.

The shopkeeper obliged, and Delo put the bottles into his robe pouch one by one, clinking together. Finally, the shopkeeper said, "The bottles will break in your pouch."

"Don't worry. It's not my first time to carry liquor bottles this way."

The shopkeeper nodded and smiled as Delo shuffled out of the shop in a cloud of clinks. He watched from a shop window as Delo pulled cash from the wallet, shook it, and tossed it into a ditch by the dirt road running through the town. The shopkeeper wagged his head, not daring to imagine the bad things Delo had done.

A few days later, as Delo sat in his family's white tent, his neck and face bright red, and holding a liquor bottle in his right hand as his body swayed back and forth, he heard his neighbor's watchdog bark furiously. He heard horse hooves on the

frozen ground near his tent and guessed that, as usual, when he went on a drinking spree, his wife had fled to her parents' home, and now someone was escorting her home. Unperturbed, he continued swigging from the bottle.

Outside, Delo's village leader and two local policemen dismounted near the tent. Delo's family had owned around fifty yaks and four horses when they set up a new tent four years earlier. Delo, addicted to gambling and drinking, had sold all the livestock except his red horse within two years. He fed the horse corn every winter afternoon and evening, so it stayed near the tent. Pointing at the horse, a policeman declared, "That's the horse the young man described. There's no doubt that Delo robbed him."

Fifteen days later, Delo was released from police custody. He assumed his wife was back home. He was wrong. He never saw her again.

Eventually, Delo stopped his motorcycle near a small black yak-hair tent pitched on the frozen riverbank. He raised his right hand and waited for Wanbo, who stopped his truck nearby and then drove to a pile of white plastic bags near the tent.

A woman with disheveled hair wearing a tattered cloth robe emerged from the tent and walked to the truck as Wanbo got out and closed the door. The woman smiled at Wanbo, "Come to my tent and have some tea."

Wanbo looked at her. She seemed familiar, but he wasn't sure who she was. He smiled and said, "No. I'm in a hurry. We should load the bags on the truck right now."

Delo, Wanbo, the woman, and her tall, skinny eighteen-year-old son loaded the bags on the truck. The bags weren't heavy, so they finished quickly. The woman looked at her son, sprawled on the ground, "I'll be back tomorrow. Look after our yaks."

Meanwhile, Delo took 2,000 RMB from his vest pocket and handed it to Wanbo. Ignoring the money, Wanbo inquired, "Does this family have only a few yaks?"

Delo looked at the nine yaks on a nearby hill, "That's right."

Wanbo hesitated, "It's not a reasonable payment for this poor woman. I'm sure she doesn't have much money."

"I promised to give you 2,000 RMB, so take it. By the Three Jewels, you have to take this money!" Delo insisted.

"Don't swear," Wanbo cautioned and reluctantly accepted the money.

"You don't need to unload the bags. She and her mother will do it. Drive safely," Delo said, getting on his motorcycle and speeding off.

The driver and the woman started off in the truck after Delo drove his motorcycle away.

After some minutes of driving, Wanbo asked, "What's your name?"

"Kyiko."

"Is Kyilo your mother?"

"Yes."

"Are you an only child?"

"Yes."

"Your mother and my mother were neighbors when they were children. They are best friends. Your mother often came to my home and helped my mother and grandmother when she was a child."

Kyiko smiled.

When the steering wheel became hard to turn, Wanbo brought the truck to a stop, got out, and checked the tires. A back tire was flat. He removed the jack and lug nut wrench from behind the driver's seat, got the spare tire from under the truck, loosened the flat tire's lug nuts, jacked up the truck, unscrewed the lug nuts, took off the flat tire, put on the spare tire, fastened the lug nuts securely, and stored the jack and wrench. This was all tiring. Perspiring and panting, Wanbo sat on the road leaning against the truck and wiping the sweat from his face with a jacket sleeve.

Kyiko got out of the truck, announcing, "I must return home after taking this dung to Mother in town. I'm giving a four-year-old male yak in payment."

"What? A yak!" Wanbo exclaimed.

"Delo visited one morning. When I asked about hiring a truck to take bags of yak dung to Mother in town, he said he would help me find a cheap truck and driver. My family only had 227 RMB, so I asked him how much it would cost. He said it would cost several thousand RMB. I told him I couldn't afford it, but I had to transport the dung to my mother. She had asked me a month earlier for yak dung fuel. Delo said I could give him a four-year-old male yak as payment. He said yak prices were low this year. I trusted him and agreed."

"What a bad guy! Yak prices this year are much higher than in previous years. A four-year-old male yak can bring at least 5,000 RMB," Wanbo said and sighed.

Sadness clouded Kyiko's face. "I see. He lied to me," she concluded. "What should I do?"

Wanbo stood, looked at her, and said, "Don't trust him."

"Should I tell the local police?"

Wanbo got in the truck without replying, and Kyiko followed.

It was dark when they reached Kyiko's mother's house. Wanbo stood in the back of the truck and handed the bags to Kyiko, who took them to a small storeroom adjoining the house. Kyiko was tired and slowly walked between the storeroom and the truck. Impatient, Wanbo dumped the last bags on the ground. A few bags broke open. Chunks of dry yak dung scattered.

Kyiko put her walking stick under her left arm, picked up some dung chunks, and placed them in a metal basin. As she bent over, white hair covered her eyes. She pushed her hair back over her shoulders with her wrinkled right hand. After filling the basin, she held it in both hands and unsteadily walked toward her house. After a few steps, she turned and invited Wanbo inside for tea.

"No, thanks. I'm in a hurry. I have to go home," he answered, looking at Kyilo's back and Kyiko.

Understanding their lives were not easy, he jumped down from the truck and walked to Kyiko, standing at the small room's door. He put his right hand into the pocket where he had the cash Delo had given him, thinking of giving it to Kyiko, but then reconsidered. Taking an empty hand from the pocket, he sighed and cautioned, "Please learn from this. Never trust Delo."

"Yes. Should I tell the police?"

He silently got in his truck and drove off.

Tsonko and his son, Drashi, rode to the local town in their neighbor's car early the following day. When they arrived, the driver got a call and didn't have time to drive them to Wanbo's home, so they got out and began walking. When they neared the police station, they saw three policemen escorting Delo into the police station yard. Drashi exclaimed, "Father, look! Delo's been arrested. What happened to him? Is he a bad man?"

"No worries. Delo's a good man and will be released soon," Tsonko lied, sure Delo had done something terrible.

He looked at his eight-year-old son, wearing a red cap and holding a lollipop in his right hand, and urged, "Walk faster! Wanbo's waiting for us. He's taking his daughter to a hospital in the city this morning."

Drashi replied, "You're right. Delo gave me candy. He's a good man. I like him!"

"People give candies to good boys. Do you want to be a good boy?" his father asked.

"Yes. I want to be a good boy," the son said.


The son stopped walking after a few minutes and asked, "Father, am I a good boy?"

"You're my son, so you're a good boy. I bought you a lollipop. I don't buy candy for bad boys."

The son happily walked faster to keep up with his father.

22

A HERDSWOMAN

 'm a twenty-six-year-old herder living alone in a black yak-hair tent. My mother was with me for the last five days before returning to the local township town where my four-year-old son lives with my stepfather and mother. They run a small shop. Stepfather had asked Mother to return because he wanted the two of them to attend a horserace. Last year, Stepfather bought two racehorses and made a bit of money by selling them this year.

Mother promised she would return and stay with me after the horserace. I'm glad she is here because she helps with my many chores, and I enjoy her companionship.

When Mother was here, I got up around six AM, but I'm getting up at five today. I yawn, groggy with sleep, pull on my fabric robe, and wrap my head and face in a red scarf. Local women will say I'm lazy if I'm still milking at noon.

It's dark. I can't see well, so I turn on my flashlight and gather my metal milk bucket and a rope to hobble the yaks. I leave the tent and walk to the creek near my family's yak enclosure to wash my hands before milking. Sharp needles pierce my heart when I touch the water. I am now completely alert, so no more yawns. I wash my hands and rinse the inside of my bucket.

It's still dark. I can't identify which calf belongs to which mother yak. I turn on the flashlight and untie a calf that thrusts its tail high in the air and runs to its mother, lying on the ground chewing its cud. The calf circles its mother, hoping she'll stand. The mother yak ignores the calf, so it impatiently butts her belly, making her stand. The calf now energetically nurses.

As I walk near the mother yak, I turn off the flashlight. If I don't, she'll jerk back when the light shines into her eyes. I place the flashlight and the bucket on the ground and hobble the yak's front legs. I used to hobble every mother yak no matter how gentle they seemed, but then I stopped to save time and only hobbled the more boisterous yaks. Then, I milked a gentle yak that kicked my bucket over a few days ago. Instantly, milk from ten yaks became a white splash on the ground. I angrily hit the mother yak with my fist and cried. Mother noticed and scolded, "You are possessed by bad fortune. I told you several times to hobble the yaks before milking."

Now, I pull the rope around the neck of the calf, furiously nursing its mother. I use all my strength to pull it back and tie it to the other calves' tether rope. I then milk the mother yak.

I repeat this process, yak after yak until my bucket is full. Carrying it into the

tent, I pour the milk into a big aluminum pot that I cover with a lid and place near the stove. I'm thirsty, so I take the kettle from the metal stove in the middle of the tent and pour cold tea into a bowl. I gulp down the tea, listening as it gurgles down my throat. I'm still thirsty, so I have a second bowl. After drinking, I place the bowl in an adobe box for protection. Years ago, when Mother and I were milking, a yak entered our tent, licking kitchen items and breaking several bowls. Later, when Stepfather realized there were fewer bowls, he scolded Mother.

After milking around twenty yaks, I hear singing in the distance. I see the neighbor boy mount a white horse and drive his family's yaks from a hill to the family's yak enclosure. He is a primary school student and is home on summer vacation. He's a good, obedient boy who helps his parents herd their yaks during summer and winter vacations. I keep milking as he vanishes from sight. I milk ten more yaks and then untie all the mother yaks and calves.

I now bring this other bucket full of milk into the tent and set it down before driving my family's yaks to the rich grass on the mountain and returning home.

With a willow basket on my back, I use my right hand to scoop fresh yak dung and toss it into the basket. The basket is very heavy when full. I stagger near the tent and dump the dung onto the ground. I resume collecting until there is no fresh dung in the yak enclosure. My next task is to spread the dung on the ground to dry for fuel using my palms and outstretched fingers. Finished, I walk to the creek and wash my hands, face, and shoes, stained with yak dung.

Back in the tent, I rub moisturizing lotion on my face before adding dry dung and flammable gel to the stove, which I light with a match. I pull out the ash container from the lower part of the stove and peer out from the tent, holding it in my hands. I don't want to dump the ash on passersby and create back luck for myself. Once I'm certain no passersby are near, I walk outside and dump the ash near the creek banks.

Returning, I put the pot, half full of milk, on the stove to warm up while continuing with daily chores. To properly sweep inside the tent with many shrubs bound together with a cord, I need to move my two old robes, my son's robe I use for a pillow, and my sleeping mat to the lower part of the tent.

It's now time to take the pot from the stove. Placing it next to the milk separator, I add two scoops of milk to the separator's milk container and one scoop of cold milk from the milk bucket. I turn the separator's handle with my right hand, sending cream and skim milk in two separate streams to different metal basins on the ground, one on either side of the separator.

Finally, I finish, and it's time for a breakfast of a couple of spoons of roasted barley flour, dry cheese, a piece of butter, and hot tea in a bowl. I blow the melted butter to one side and sip some tea. Then I go outside and check on the yaks. A few are heading toward the neighboring tribe's territory. Mother has repeatedly warned me not to let our yaks graze outside our land. Once when a family's yaks grazed on a neighbor's land, the two families quarreled and didn't speak to each other for months. So, after quickly sipping a little more tea from my bowl and using my index finger to

stir the barley flour, cheese, and butter at the bottom of the bowl, I swallow it all and step outside.

With alarm, I realize the riding yak I tied in the yak enclosure has disappeared, so I walk fast toward the yaks up the mountain. Sweat rolls down my forehead, and my shirt sticks to my back. I shout at the yaks ambling towards another family's land. Sometimes when I yell, they pause and graze for a while. I keep shouting until my throat is hoarse. I forgot to bring my slingshot, so I throw rocks at the yaks, driving them back to where the rest of my family's yaks are grazing.

Exhausted, I lie on the grassland, breathe deeply, stretch out my legs and arms, look into the deep blue sky, and begin remembering.

I gave birth to my first child, a son, when I was twenty-two. I lost contact with my boyfriend after I gave birth. I knew he wouldn't take responsibility for our child, which is the case for most young men in my home place.

When my son turned three, I left him at home with my parents and followed my second man to his parents' home in a tribe that had fought my tribe in a grassland conflict years earlier. Knowing Stepfather and Mother would object if I requested permission to marry a man from an enemy tribe, I went to his home one night without informing them.

I spent three years in his home. My husband ridiculed me when his friends came to visit. Why did I put up with that? Was it true love? Was it a lack of options? Why did I stay for so long?

Once when three of his friends were visiting and chatting while watching TV, my husband asked me to switch the TV channel because the remote control was near me. I didn't know which button to press and accidentally turned the TV off. My husband yelled, "Stupid! Foolish woman!" as he snatched the control.

His friends laughed, and his parents scowled. My face turned red, so I grabbed a water container and a scoop and ran outside. As I scooped water from the Yellow River, I wondered why I should spend my life with a man who denigrated and humiliated me. I asked myself, "Why don't you go back home and care for your mother, child, and stepfather? Why do you stay here and serve your husband and his parents?"

A friend told me, "Your mother and stepfather are very kind to your son. Your stepfather is very fond of your boy and spoils him. He buys things for him each time he goes to the township town."

I now regret leaving my son.

I stayed with my husband for a few more weeks until he made it clear he would not formally marry me because his parents disapproved. He didn't say precisely why. I assumed it was because they thought I was an idiot. For example, sometimes, I used "sister" to address my mother-in-law when I should have used "aunt." Also, they thought I had stupidly told others about how they had quarreled and thus betrayed the family.

Father-in-law maintained that our neighbor's yaks were more robust than our family's. Mother-in-law had the opposite view. Their quarrel grew as they verbally humiliated the other's parents, siblings, and other relatives. Neither their son nor I could persuade them to stop quarreling. They only stopped when they were tired and then didn't speak to one another for days.

Suddenly realizing I haven't yet made cheese, I walk down the mountain to my tent. I put a big pot on the stove and fill it with skim milk. From a plastic container, I add a starter of spoiled yogurt. I periodically stir the pot to prevent the cheese from burning on the bottom while adding dry yak dung to the stove to ensure the milk temperature is high enough to make cheese. When whey forms, I use a filter to press the cheese down, scoop whey from the pot, and pour it into the milk bucket. To ensure no insects drown in the hot whey, I carry it outside after it cools. When we had a watchdog, we would mix the whey with wheat flour or roasted barley powder and feed the dog. But we no longer have a dog, so I pour out all the whey.

Just before Stepfather, Mother, and my son moved to the township town two years ago, they sold some of our yaks, divided the remaining yaks, and asked a close relative to herd some of them. They don't need a watchdog in the township town, so they gave our watchdog to Stepfather's brother's family.

Putting the big piece of cheese in a piece of plastic, I crumble it into small bits with my hands for about thirty minutes. Usually, I dry fresh cheese outside, but I have to herd yaks and collect herbs. If the cheese is outside and it rains, it dissolves and drains away, so I leave it inside the tent to dry.

In preparation for my next task, I remove my robe and put on a fabric skirt that reaches my ankles and a cloth jacket. I tie my white-cloth fritillary bag to my waist and pick up my fritillary trowel. Leaving the tent, I tie the flap of the tent entrance, putting rocks on the bottom of the flap to prevent stray dogs from entering and eating the cheese. I head to the mountain where my yaks are grazing.

For several hours I collect fritillary bulbs in the hot sunshine before resting in the shade of a big tree. When I see the neighbor family's mother and her son approaching, I know they have come to collect bulbs. There are many fritillary bulbs on this mountain, so local women have begun collecting them this year because prices have increased.

As they approach, I resume collecting. The mother is kind and cheerful and asks how my bulb-gathering is going.

"Not bad. It's sweltering, so I can't collect as many as I like."

The boy wipes sweat from his forehead with his right hand as if agreeing. They sit on the ground and rest.

The mother continues, "You're a good woman. You support your mother and stepfather so they can enjoy their town life and don't need to herd. It's good if you don't need to do many things and can rest."

"Mother, Stepfather, and my son will attend a horserace. They cared for my

son when I lived in my husband's home. It's a lot of work to care for a child. I don't know how to repay them except herd so they can enjoy town life. They can also earn some money by running their shop."

"It's tough for you to milk yaks, collect yak dung, make cheese and butter, herd yaks, and collect fritillary."

"It's okay. All local women do what I'm doing."

"Women are unlucky. We're busy all the time and suffer so many hardships. Maybe in our next life, we'll be lucky and not be reborn as women."

"I sometimes feel it is okay to do so much work because I want to provide a good life for my family members."

"Right. Family is everything."

"Who is herding your family's yaks?"

"My husband."

"I see."

"He prefers to herd yaks rather than collect fritillary."

I don't respond, but we soon resume chatting as we start collecting.

Suddenly the boy shouts, "Snake!"

The mother jerks, turns, loses consciousness, and falls to the ground. The boy and I laugh.

I'm afraid of snakes, but I pretend not to be. "Where's the snake?" I ask.

The boy points with a long dry stick, "There!"

The boy's mother suddenly stands and, as she rushes away, yells, "Grab some earth and throw it at the snake. Otherwise, it will think, 'I've encountered weak black-headed humans who can't do anything bad to me, so I'll eat many insects when I meet humans.' But don't throw stones at the snake. Nothing can atone for killing a snake. Don't injure it."

Then she collapses and tumbles to the ground again. Laughing loudly, the boy picks up loose soil and tosses it at the snake. I use my trowel to dig up some earth and throw it at the snake that slithers under a short shrub, constantly flicking its forked tongue.

I tell the boy to use his stick to push behind the snake's head and hold it so I can touch its tail. Mother had told me if I touched a snake's tail, all of my bad fortune would disappear.

Pressing the snake's neck with the stick, the boy urges, "Sister, touch its tail."

"Are you sure you won't lose control of the snake?"

"Sister, don't worry. I won't let it bite you."

I touch the long black snake's tail, which is rough and scaly. Suddenly what feels like a thorn pierces my heart. Released, the snake slithers into a hole near the shrub.

The boy's mother, now revived, approaches us. The boy laughs, "Such a coward! You're afraid of snakes!"

Later in the early afternoon, the boy announces that he's hungry.

The mother takes the pack from her back, saying, "Let's eat!"

She sits on the ground and unpacks two bottles of milk tea and a plastic bag half full of fried bread. The boy sits by his mother. I haven't brought any food, so I continue collecting fritillary until the mother says, "Come join us! There's enough food for us all."

I sit next to the boy and eat some bread while the boy crumbles some bread crumbs to feed the ants. His mother objects, "Don't feed bread to ants. They should only eat clean food. They'll suffer if they eat unclean food."

Holding the bread in his left hand, he protests, "This bread is clean. I'll accumulate merit if I feed the ants."

"Your hands are dirty, which makes the food unclean. You'll sin if you feed the ants contaminated food."

The son accepts this and stops.

We continue eating the bread and sipping milk tea. The mother and her son share one bottle of milk tea, and I drink the other.

After the meal, we collect fritillary until sunset, and then they return to their home while I drive my yaks back home.

It's almost dark when I tether the mother yaks and their calves and gather the remaining yaks near the tent.

I see three yaks on the mountain top where I herded my family's yaks. I'm sure I didn't see them when I drove the others back home. After deciding to leave them there, I change my mind, worried that wolves might kill them. Grabbing my flashlight, I mount my black, polled riding yak. My riding yak is gentle, so I don't grip its hair with my hands. But suddenly, when we reach the middle of the mountain, the yak bolts, sending me tumbling to the ground. I don't know why it was frightened. Maybe a rabbit scared it. I chase the yak but don't catch it.

My clothes are wet when I reach the mountain top where the yaks are lying on the ground, chewing their cuds. As I approach, shining my flashlight at them, they stand. I gently herd them back home, making sure to go slow. If I drive them quickly, they'll run fast, and I'll lose them in the dark. I continue slowly driving them home.

It is about one AM when I finally get home. I'm exhausted. After leading the yaks into their enclosure, I go to bed without eating.

The following day, I get up at six AM to milk the yaks. After milking twenty yaks, I see vultures hovering not far from my tent. I suddenly remember the riding yak I rode last night. I am anxious to see why the vultures are busy.

A distressing sight confronts me. Wolves killed the riding yak in a ditch. The wolves and vultures have eaten virtually all of the yak's flesh, leaving only the head, bones, and internal organs. Bits of flesh, guts, hair, and hide are scattered. The yak's tail is far from the other parts. Blood has turned the ground dark red. The yak's eye sockets are empty, so I quickly look away. Tears cloud my eyes. I chant the Six Sacred Syllables and blow at the yak's head so its soul will suffer less. Chanting mantras help the animal suffer less, and blowing transfers the mantras' power to a suffering or

dead animal.

I leave and stand far from the yak's remains. The vultures reaggregate, bite one another, stretch out their wings, and vocalize. Two vultures pull a long gut back and forth with their beaks.

Life is so impermanent. Last night my gentle riding yak was alive but then died within hours. I regret riding it last night. I feel responsible for its death, and can't bear to watch the vultures do their work any longer and walk back to my tent.

I chant the Six Sacred Syllables all day and light a butter lamp that night. This relieves my depression and sense of guilt.

...

On a hot summer day six years earlier, while herding my family's yaks on a high mountain, I rested in the shade of a big tree, where it was cool and comfortable. I lay down and slept for about an hour. When I woke up, I found that wolves had killed my family's two-year-old calf. Vultures were picking at what remained.

That night, Stepfather complained to Mother that I didn't herd the yaks well. Mother shot back, "If my daughter doesn't herd well, you herd them!"

They quarreled until Mother left the tent. She returned about a half-hour later and, without saying anything, went to bed. Stepfather was having a bowl of noodles. Feeling sad and with little appetite, I left my half-eaten bowl of noodles and went to bed.

The following day at six AM, I woke up, pulled on my robe, picked up my milk bucket, walked out of the tent, and started toward our yak enclosure, but I didn't see Mother. Typically, she gets up earlier than me and has finished milking around twenty yaks when I arrive with my milk bucket. I knew something was wrong when I realized she had milked no yaks. I rushed back to the tent, woke Stepfather, and said, "Mother has disappeared."

He rubbed his eyes and said, "She's not milking yaks?"

"No, she hasn't milked any yaks."

He worriedly got into his robe and ran to the neighbor's tent. Not knowing what else to do, I began milking our yaks and finished at around ten AM. I made a fire in the stove, heated the leftover noodles, and ate some.

After breakfast, I waited for Stepfather or Mother. When they didn't return, I mounted a yak and drove my family's yaks to the mountains.

In the late evening, I drove our yaks back home. I entered my family tent and saw Mother, her brother, and Stepfather. I was so happy to see Mother that tears trickled down my cheeks.

I asked Mother no questions. Uncle stayed in our tent that night.


The next day, Uncle and Mother talked privately near my family's yak enclosure until Uncle mounted his horse and rode away. Later, Mother told me she had walked to her parents' home around two AM.

I stop recalling the past and close my eyes, but I still can't sleep. Mother told me she would return after the horserace. I hope she won't visit. I'm sure Stepfather and my son will come with her. Stepfather will notice the riding yak is missing, and when I explain that wolves killed it, he will complain to Mother, "Your daughter doesn't take good care of the yaks."

I don't want them to quarrel and make everyone unhappy.

23

A NEW FAMILY

hamo wiped a square transistor radio encased in dark plastic with her black scarf and nestled it into the old folded robe she used as a pillow. As usual, she clicked the radio on at nine PM, ensuring the volume was as low as possible to prevent her father, Drashi, from scolding her. Radio sounds disturbed his sleep.

No one asked Lhamo why she listened to the radio every night.

Lhamo and her mother, Chodron, slept on one side of the family's one-room house. Drashi slept on the opposite side with some of the family's belongings. There was no place for beds, so they slept on the floor.

At three AM, Chodron stood in utter darkness before going outside to relieve herself. She was surprised and a little afraid by a red light flashing from Lhamo's pillow. Creeping over, she realized it was just the radio light and switched it off. Clad only in a suit of long black underwear and a stained white shirt, she walked outside without her robe. She returned two minutes later, gently closed the wooden door, walked to the right side of the room, and snuggled into Drashi's bed.

The following day, Chodron got up at six AM and was about to wake Lhamo but found she was not in the room. Usually, when Chodron roused Lhamo, she would yawn, reply, "Okay," and continue to doze until her father woke her. Chodron put on her robe and went outside, finding Lhamo already collecting dung in the family's yak enclosure. She slung a yak dung basket on her back and joined Lhamo, who wore tattered cloth gloves, while Chodron picked up dung chunks with her bare hands.

Meanwhile, Drashi was inside preparing a meal. He thrust a small bunch of shrub branches into the metal stove in the center of the room, added dried yak dung, and lit the branches with a match. Some minutes later, water began boiling in a soot-blackened kettle above the fire while a pot of leftover beef noodles heated on the stove.

When the noodles bubbled, Drashi called Chodron and Lhamo, who stopped adding frozen and fresh yak dung to the yak enclosure wall. They placed their baskets near the enclosure entrance and helped each other brush dust from their robes.

Drashi poured lukewarm water into a red plastic basin where Chodron and Lhamo washed their hands. Lhamo unwrapped her black scarf and looked into a mirror on the wall near the room door. She wiped the dust from her nose, squeezing it for a while, upset that her nose was more prominent than she wished. She sat beside her mother on the left side of the room, ready for breakfast.

After breakfast, Lhamo washed the dishes in a basin, swept the room, picked up a twenty-five-liter plastic water container, and headed to the river that ran thirty meters from the house. After filling the container with a plastic scoop, she placed it on a boulder, steadied it with her left hand, crouched down, positioned it against her back, pulled a red sash through the container's handle, and then trudged back to the house with it on her back. As she walked, water sloshed out of the container wetting her robe. She ignored it as usual.

Chodron noticed Lhamo's robe was wet but hesitated to ask her to change into another robe. Lhamo had refused to change her robe enough times for Chodron to conclude making this suggestion was useless. But, to her surprise, this time, Lhamo put on another robe without being reminded, mounted a polled black yak, and drove her family's hundred yaks to a nearby mountain.

Drashi sat near the stove, holding a cigarette between his index and middle fingers, stained yellowed from frequently holding cigarette butts. Igniting a long, thin stick in the stove, he lit the cigarette and puffed.

Chodron was sitting nearby and coughed. Drashi laughed, and she lightly hit his shoulder with tenderness. He inhaled deeply and blew the smoke over her face, making her cough again, lower her head, and wipe away tears.

Drashi again laughed.

After moving to the other side of the room, Chodron said, "I wonder why Lhamo has lately become so responsible? She gets up early, fetches water, and does family chores without being asked."

"She is mature and old enough to understand what her burden is. She should marry."

"She's only seventeen."

"My mother married when she was sixteen."

Chodron had married when she was seventeen, so she didn't know what to say.

On top of the mountain, Lhamo and Badkho watched their families' yaks grazing below. Lhamo leaned her head against Badkho's shoulder and gazed at distant mountain ranges where trees covered the middle sections. The mountains were topped by snowy peaks steeped in the blue sky and surrounded by rambling flocks of clouds. Lhamo rarely blinked. Maybe she was enjoying the beautiful scenery or contemplating.

A breeze blew a lock of her hair, blocking her view. Brushing it away, she asked, "What is a good girl?"

Lhamo often asked Badkho such questions. He thought for a while, recalling a relevant incident. Once when he had gone to town and walked near the local government compound, he joined a crowd he'd noticed in a courtyard. The local leader, clad in a black suit and wearing dark sunglasses, was surrounded by people. Lhamotso, a tall woman with high cheekbones, had just been designated the third greatest woman in the community, an honor given just once in a decade. The leader

told Lhamotso to stand next to him as he handed her a large certificate. She dared not even glance at the onlookers; her face reddened when they applauded. Finally, the leader pointed to a black mare tied to a stake nearby and announced to Lhamotso, "It's yours!"

Everyone clapped again.

Badkho answered Lhamo, "A good girl listens to her parents, like Lhamotso, who earned the greatest woman award in our community."

In the early evening, Badkho's father, Badma, visited Drashi. Badma wore a Tibetan robe, high-heeled leather boots almost reaching his knees, and a motorcycle helmet. Drashi and Chodron warmly greeted him as he got off his motorcycle. Once inside the one-room house, he sat on the floor crossed-legged next to Drashi.

Chodron offered Badma a bowl of milk tea, which he sipped while chatting with Drashi. Meanwhile, Chodron prepared dumplings, kneading dough for wrappers in a basin and slicing a chunk of meat on a cutting board while listening to Drashi and Badma's conversation.

As the sun descended behind a spectacular, high mountain, Badma took a strip of white silk from his robe pouch, which he presented to show respect, and black cloth folded in four layers. He offered these respectfully to Drashi, who accepted them, signifying that he accepted Badkho's proposal to marry Lhamo. Badma then stood and said he was ready to leave. Drashi urged him to stay the night, but he declined.

Drashi and Chodron escorted Badma to his motorcycle, which he got on, and roared into the distance, heading home.

As Chodron and Lhamo were tying their family's yaks in the enclosure, Chodron spoke, "Your father accepted Badma's proposal that you and Badkho marry."

Lhamo was happy to hear the name "Badkho" and ignored the rest of what her mother said. She concentrated on restraining a wild calf.

Lhamo's favorite food was steamed dumplings stuffed with minced beef, and she usually ate ten to fifteen, but that night, she ate only two and felt full.

As usual, she turned on the radio and listened to the local broadcast. A man spoke in a pleasing, clear voice, "Lhamotso was recognized as the greatest woman in our Tanggar Community. She never attended school but instead herded yaks from the age of six, never disobeyed her parents, and agreed to whatever decisions her parents made. Her parents and neighbors considered her to be extremely filial. Her parents arranged her marriage, as did other parents of the children in that community. Her female friends knew she was eager to marry her lover but obeyed her parents."

Having heard the same account countless times, Lhamo turned down the volume and stared at the ceiling. Later that night, rolling over in bed, she imagined her marriage. In the distance, she heard her father snoring and her family's watchdog barking.

The next day, Lhamo herded her family's yaks on the mountain, where her lover, Badkho, often herded his family's yaks. But this day, Badkho did not come. Lhamo missed him and was upset but imagined they would eventually marry and live the rest of their lives happily together.

In the evening, when Lhamo entered her family's house after tethering the yaks, she was surprised to see Badkho sitting with her father on the right side of the room. Lhamo had no idea why Badkho would have visited.

Later, when she went out to pee with her mother, she learned that Badkho was her fiancé. Lhamo couldn't believe her ears and asked, "What did you say? He's going to marry me?"

Her mother answered, "Yes. Both sets of parents have agreed."

"You told me Badma's son, Badkho, would marry me yesterday."

"Yesterday, I just said you would marry Badkho. You didn't let me finish. You ran after a calf. Anyway, Badma's nephew will marry you, not Badma's son."

Lhamo silently sighed.

The next day, Lhamo and Badma's son, Badkho, sat where they usually rested. Lhamo put her head against Badkho's chest, listening to his heartbeats as he watched a slow-moving herd of clouds.

Once Lhamo informed him about her marriage, they said nothing for some minutes. Then Lhamo closed her eyes and asked, "What is a good wife?"

Badkho pondered, not responding immediately, and finally said, "A good wife is loyal to her husband and never betrays him."

When it was time to drive the yaks home, Badkho stared at Lhamo's double-lidded eyes, high straight nose, and rosy cheeks. He wanted to embrace her, but he held back, thinking, "She's engaged to my cousin. It's immoral if I hug her. She will think I am a bad man."

He stood, mounted his riding yak, and rode away.

Lhamo stood and walked to where her riding yak was tethered. Her tall, slim body caught Badkho's final attention. He thought, "She's the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. Why can't we love each other? Why will she marry my cousin and not me? Should we flee to another tribe? No! What terrible ideas! I will not destroy the relationship between our families."

...

Lhamo's seven-year-old son, Dawa, was a grade two primary school student nine years later. Though he didn't do well in school, most students admired him because he had a great mother. Locals believed she would earn the honor bestowed once a decade - the greatest woman in their community. The chosen woman was a model for all women to follow.

Lhamo and her husband, Badkho, slept in a new adobe house that adjoined her family's old house.

One night, Badkho went to sleep early. At nine PM, Lhamo turned on the radio as she continued to do every night and listened to the local broadcast for thirty

minutes. Again, the night's broadcast mentioned how Lhamotso had become the third greatest woman in Tanggar Community.

...

Badkho's maternal uncle, Pakba, was surrounded by local men at a meeting. "We should choose three candidates for the next greatest woman. The local government will send some people here in the next two months and select one of them."

Local men discussed this in small groups. Most chose Lhamo as a candidate, but the leader disagreed, arguing, "Once I heard Lhamo secretly met her lover, Badma's son, Badkho, on the day after she was engaged, so she's ineligible to be a candidate."

Drashi disputed, "They herded yaks on the same mountain that day. She didn't plan for that to happen. Don't lie! Your daughter, Lhadzom, doesn't qualify. She's not faithful. I heard she has several lovers."

It was the first time someone had opposed Pakba. His face flushed as he stood and stomped toward Drashi while fumbling in his robe pouch. Others knew they would fight and restrained Pakba as the two men angrily shouted at each other.

Locals agreed quickly to choose Drala and Dzombe as candidates but disagreed for hours over choosing Lhadzom or Lhamo as the third candidate, eventually deciding on Lhamo.

The next day, as it was snowing late in the evening, Drashi's family's watchdog barked furiously. Drashi went out as a horse rider neared his family's yak enclosure. When the rider waved, Drashi walked over to Pakba.

After a half-hour, Chodron grew concerned. Seeing someone lying near the entrance of the yak enclosure, she rushed over. It was Drashi. Blood flowed from his head, his face was pale, and he could not speak. Chodron wept while using her apron to staunch the bleeding. Sitting on the muddy ground, she held Drashi's bloody head in her lap and gazed into her husband's eyes as his life drained away.

A few days later, Chodron ordered Lhamo, "Divorce Badkho. Treat him as our enemy. His maternal uncle killed your father."

Lhamo knew Badkho loved her and would provide life-long companionship. He had spent most of their nine years of marriage with her at home. He had only participated in local horse races three times and had only been twice to the local township town to pick up their son from the primary school. He had taken their son to the local school only three times. Locals called him "grandpa" because he spent most of his time at home like an old man. He never beat her and bought shirts and scarves for her each time he went to town.

Lhamo protested, "He didn't kill my father, and he's my son's father. Why should I treat him as my enemy?"

Chodron, squinting at Lhamo, demanded, "Listen! Divorce Badkho. If you don't, it's a big shame for our family. If you quarrel with me and don't listen, locals will think you are not filial. You will not become the next greatest woman."

Announcing that she didn't want to be a great woman, Lhamo picked up her

radio, smashed it on the floor, and shouted, "I don't want to be who you want me to be!"

Lhamo asked her cousin, Ngakwang, to take her to the township town the next day. As they got on Ngakwang's motorcycle, he turned and cautioned before starting the engine, "Don't be angry with your mother. Obey her. Don't entertain silly ideas. Stay with her. Your home is where your mother lives."

After a few seconds, Lhamo lied, "I'm not going to leave my family. I only want to visit my son."

Sitting on a patch of grass in front of the school's dining room, Dawa held a small metal bowl of rice and chunks of potatoes and beef. He started to eat, but when he saw his mother walking toward him, he ran to her, leaving a trail of potatoes, rice, and meat.

Lhamo went with Dawa to his Tibetan teacher, Tubden, and asked for permission to take Dawa to lunch in a nearby restaurant. "We'll return as soon as possible," she assured.

After that, no one knew Lhamo and Dawa's whereabouts. They had disappeared.

Time passed, and Badkho married a woman from another tribe, and they eventually moved to her home. Locals said his wife and his mother were locked in endless quarrels.


Some years later, Lhamo and Dawa returned to their tribe with a tall, bearded, bald man – Lhamo's husband. Lhamo could not pronounce his name, so she called him Tarwa.

Tarwa was kind to Lhamo and treated Dawa as his son. Locals couldn't understand Tarwa's language. Sometimes, Lhamo and Tarwa had challenges communicating, but both felt loved when they were together. Each time Tarwa went to town, he bought things for Dawa that he would enjoy. Dawa was happy and loved Tarwa.

They established a new family in Tanggar Community.

24

A PREGNANT BOY

randfather believed time might change everything, but not certain memories. In his early eighties and clad in a silk robe, he sat in a shiny red armchair made from juniper wood with his four-year-old grandson squirming on his lap. He often recalled his childhood even though his cognitive ability had declined to the point that sometimes he didn't recognize his son unless he was introduced to him.

Grandfather would never forget the year he turned four. Vivid memories of that time would stay with him until he died. His father had been a wealthy merchant who regularly traveled to Lhasa with the heads of his neighbors' families, relatives, and friends. They traded local yaks and sheep for silk cloth, carpets, barley, and rice.

One evening, after a few weeks at home, the usual group of about ten men prepared for their next journey. They packed roasted barley flour, butter, cheese, wool blankets, pulverized jerky, powdered yogurt, sheep-skin robes, wooden bowls, kettles, pots, and a few knives wrapped in small pieces of cloth into yak-leather bags. Early the following day, about two hours before sunrise, they secured the bags on four yaks, mounted their horses, and set off for Lhasa driving ten yaks, twenty sheep, and the pack yaks.

Grandfather, at this time, was four years old and his parents' only child. He spent most of his time with his mother, rarely playing with his neighbor's children. After a neighbor's watchdog had mauled a neighbor boy, his mother didn't allow him to play with neighbor children.

One summer evening, after playing near his family's tent, he tired and lay on his back, gazing up at the thick black clouds that gathered and seemed to be quickly moving ever nearer the earth. Scared, he rushed into the tent.

A half-hour later, black clouds of darkness shrouded the earth, and heavy rain fell. As water flowed through the tent, his mother held him till the rain stopped. She put a carpet her husband had brought from Lhasa on one side of the tent, wrapped her son in a wool blanket she had made herself, and waited until he was asleep before going outside to drive their yaks into the enclosure and tying them all securely. Next, she urged the family's sheep into the sheep pen, fastened the gate, and headed back to the tent.

Thirty minutes later, she had finished cooking beef with noodles and woke her son. Groggy with sleep, he rubbed his eyes with his hands, sat up, and clung to his mother. He managed to eat a small bowl of noodles while his mother ate two

bowls.

"When will Father return?"

"In a few days," his mother lied, filling the boy's heart with joy, so he hugged her.

A rush of loud noises suddenly punctuated this happy scene. The mother could only imagine wolves had attacked the livestock.

The family's yak enclosure and sheep pen were near the tent, on the bank of a small, usually-shallow river that meandered through the valley. Children played in the water during summer. The mother ran near the river as the yaks and sheep mooed and baaed frantically. There were no wolves, but yellow floodwater moved slowly down the valley a half kilometer away. Although anxious about her family's livestock, she suddenly thought of her son and rushed to the tent, picked him up, and moved as fast as possible to the top of a nearby hill. She watched floodwater surround all her livestock. The yaks were tied to long ropes and couldn't escape, and the sheep were locked in the pen. The water rose in the river, a tributary that flowed into the Yellow River at the end of the valley. The calves and mother yaks frantically mooed as they floated and thrashed about before succumbing to the raging water.

The cruel death of the livestock depressed her deeply, but she was also concerned about her neighbors. It was now very dark, and her neighbors lived several hundred meters away, so there was nothing she could do. She put her son inside her robe and held him while sitting on a boulder for about an hour until the floodwaters abated. Mother and son then returned to their tent.

The next morning, she rushed to her neighbors. Although they, too, had seen their livestock swept away by the flood, the neighbors were all safe. No one knew what to do except wait for the family heads to return from Lhasa.

Four months later, the family heads had still not returned. The mother was concerned. Without livestock, they had no dairy products or meat. They survived on only a small amount of roasted barley flour. She was certain they would starve if they did nothing. Not knowing what else to do, she decided to find her brother, who lived in another tribe. So on a sunny morning, she packed a wool blanket, two wooden bowls, and a small bag with the remaining roasted barley flour into a big bag. Squatting, she hoisted the bag onto her back and told her son to sit on the bag and hold on by putting his arms around her neck. Gripping a walking stick in her left hand, she stood, said goodbye to her neighbors, and started her journey. Her neighbors worried she and her son would lose their way. She was unsure where her brother lived, having visited his family only once a decade earlier.

Eventually, it was time for lunch after walking for hours under the scorching sun with the load on her back. The travelers sat near a creek in a deep, forested valley. She unpacked the bag and took out the wooden bowls and a small bag of roasted barley flour. She put flour in her son's small bowl, scooped creek water with her bowl, poured it into her son's bowl, and mixed the flour with water using her index finger. She handed it to her son and told him to eat. She added a bit of barley to her bowl

with water, which she ate when her son had finished his bowl. Afterward, hand in hand, they walked to a big tree near the creek and rested in the shade.

A gentle breeze cooled the air, bringing comfort. She lay on her back and quickly fell asleep. Her son picked flowers, sniffed them, pulled the blossoms apart, and mashed the petals between his thumbnails. Growing bored, he put his head in his mother's lap and slept.

Sudden thunder roused them. Frightened, the boy cried, covered his eyes with his palms, and squatted as lightning flashed. His mother picked him up, put him in her lap, pulled his head against her chest, and stroked his head. She took the wool blanket from the bag and wrapped it around him. It rained heavily for a few minutes, followed by gentle rain for an hour. A few minutes later, the sun was out again. She repacked the bag, put it on her back, helped her son assume his perch, and they set out again.

They were lost in a foggy forested valley a couple of hours later. The mother slipped on a moss-covered stone and fell, her left hip striking a large stone. In intense pain, she lay on the ground, unable to stand. Wrinkling her nose as pain spasmed through her left hip and leg, she managed to crawl slowly to a boulder a few meters away. Drenched in sweat, she lay against the rock.

After a week, the two travelers were still very much alone. They had seen no one, and she was still unable to stand. Their roasted flour was almost finished. The mother told her son to bring water from a nearby fresh-water spring in her wooden bowl. She added a bit of roasted barley flour, mixed it, and told her son to drink it. The boy's hands were covered in scratches from thorny shrubs he had pushed through to reach the spring. The mother gently touched her son's scratched hands and kissed his forehead. She took small comfort, knowing he felt full each time she gave him flour mixed with cold water, which she did twice daily. She ate very little, believing it was better for her son to eat.

Four more days passed. The roasted flour was finished. She managed to stand, though her hip was still extremely painful, and she could not stand steadily. Nevertheless, understanding death was waiting for them both if they did nothing, she managed to put the bag on her back but explained to her son that she couldn't carry him. Holding her son's right hand, they restarted their journey.

After a few minutes, they rested, again and again ... Finally, they crossed that valley and then walked through another before spending the night at the foot of a mountain.

The following day, she woke early with a throbbing hip. The flesh was red and, in some places, very dark. There was no open wound. She only knew to pray for recovery. Her son slept under the warm wool blanket. In cloudy weather, she woke him and refolded the blanket. His shirt had been torn by shrubs, exposing his swollen belly, which resembled a balloon in sharp contrast to his skinny legs and arms. She knew he was starving to death. After her son put on his robe, they started again.

They walked and rested after about a hundred steps. The son was hungry,

cried, felt weak, and asked his mother to carry him. She understood and carried him for a short distance until the pain in her hip forced her to stop. When she asked him to walk, he angrily stopped for a while.

That day, at sunset, they finally reached a mountain top from where they saw a cluster of tents at the bottom. She hoped her brother was camped there. They had met no one for days and were glad to see other herders.

When they reached the encampment, local children surrounded and curiously observed them. They smiled and whispered when they saw the outsider-child's swollen belly. A boy in a silk shirt shouted, "A pregnant boy!" The children raced away in a swirl of loud giggles.

Soon after, a man came, and when the mother asked, he told her her brother had moved to another tribe a few months earlier. The man invited them to his tent and offered food and accommodation for the night.

The next day, not knowing how to reach her brother's new tribe, the mother decided to stay where she was and work as a servant for a wealthy family. She did most daily chores and sometimes herded the family's livestock after a local traditional doctor treated her hip. The herdlord told them to live in a small tent next to his family's big tent. He promised to provide food and clothing for her and her son and pay a yak yearly for her work.

The tribe's kids played together, but the servant's son played alone unless the herdlord's daughter was with him. The girl's brother scolded her when he saw her playing with the outsider-boy. The local children mocked the servant's son, making fun of his swollen belly, though it steadily became smaller.

When the boy asked his mother if he was pregnant, she stroked his head and said, "That's impossible. Your belly is full of gold, so don't worry," diminishing his anxiety.

The servant boy often went alone to a forest near the tent where he lived because he had few playmates. One evening, he brought a piece of flat, round, yellow metal home. It was heavy. The herdlord decided it was gold and asked, "Where did you find this?"

The little boy said nothing.

The next day, the servant boy brought another piece of shiny metal identical to what he had brought the day before. His master excitedly inquired, "Where did you find this?"

The little boy did not respond.

The next day, the herdlord's son played with the servant boy, who did not go to the forest with this new companion.

The herdlord did not know how to get the servant boy to divulge where he had found the shiny metal, but he was patient and hoped his son would eventually learn this valuable information.

A few days later, a mounted man leading a packed horse arrived. When he neared the herdlord's tent, the servant's boy ran to the rider, who dismounted and

held the boy in his arms. The servant boy's mother came out of the herdlord's tent and could not believe her husband was standing before her. She had imagined bandits robbing and killing him and his friends. To see him now brought such relief that she burst into tears.

Grandfather stopped his storytelling, stroked his grandson's head, and asked, "Why did you smile?"

The boy grabbed Grandfather's ears from his perch in his lap and said, "You smiled, so I smiled."

25

AN ABANDONED HOUSE

Badlo, a businessman and a member of the Tent Tribe, hired construction workers from outside the local area to build an adobe house for his family with a living room, a small storeroom, and a shrine room.

Badlo's only child - his eighteen-year-old daughter, Badtso - slept in the storage room where the family's sheep-skin robes were packed in bags and piled along one side. Pots, pans, and other kitchen items were placed on the other side of the room. Badtso's bed was near the door.

Badlo slept alone in the shrine room, where Buddhist images were arranged on a wooden table. Butter lamps were aligned in a row in front of the images. Leather bags of rice, flour, and barley were against one room wall. Locked wooden boxes on the other side contained Badtso's and Badma's jewelry and some cash. Badlo's bed was near the door.

Badlo's sixty-three-year-old mother, Badma, slept on a wooden bed in a room where the family cooked and ate.

While most neighboring tribes lived in adobe houses, all fifty households of the Tent Tribe lived in tents, except for Badlo's family. Other tribal members admired Badlo's new house, longing to live in such a place. After Badlo's family moved in, the number of young men pursuing Badtso doubled, making other local young women even more jealous, considering Badtso's exceptional beauty.

Five years later, Badtso would abandon her family's house to live alone in a tent.

Badlo often traveled to other tribes, buying and selling yaks, returning home only two or three times a year for short stays. When his mother had a high fever and almost died, one of Badma's relatives took her to a clinic. Locals, especially those who had never ventured beyond the tribe's territory, criticized Badlo for being a dishonest husband, unfilial son, and irresponsible father.

Once, when Badlo had been absent for weeks, his wife could no longer bear the local criticisms she heard of her husband, so she left, leaving her daughter with her mother-in-law.

...

A winter morning two years earlier, Badma had slipped and fallen on the frozen ground, twisting and permanently injuring her right knee. Afterward, she used a walking stick to move about. She chastised herself when pain gripped her knee, reasoning that the pain was retribution for leaving her first husband, which she now

intensely regretted. He had tolerated her bad temper and had been kind to her. Though her second husband was handsome, he aimlessly wandered with his fellows, ignoring his family members. Unable to accept her second husband's irresponsible attitude, she again divorced.

When neighbor women chatted with Badma about her daughter-in-law's departure, Badma would say, "Her departure is understandable and reasonable."

Badtso herded the family's yaks and did most family chores.

Badma hoped her son would remarry, although she was unsure about this, imagining he might divorce the woman he married, as she had divorced her first and second husbands. She was also concerned about her unmarried granddaughter, Badtso.

One night, several young men knocked on Badtso's window and attempted to enter through the house's main door. Furious, Badtso rushed out of the house with her slingshot. Picking up stones, she shot at her retreating suitors. From that night on, there were few night visitors.

"Be gentle. No one will marry a violent woman," Badma advised Badtso.

"I don't care. I prefer being single to marrying an irresponsible man," Badtso insisted.

"You know my knee gets worse and worse. I can't help much with family chores, and your father is often not at home, so you should marry," Badma continued.

"Who should I marry?"

"A good man."

"How do I know he's a good man?"

"He's kind to you."

"I don't want to marry a good man if I don't love him."

"A smart woman marries a good man or a man who loves her. You can have a handsome boyfriend who doesn't love you. Don't marry a man you love but who doesn't love you."

"Do you think you are a smart woman?"

Badma had nothing to say.

...

One of Badtso's friends married and had a son in the next two years. They chatted when they encountered each other while herding yaks high on a mountain. Gossiping about marriage and the unmarried women in their late twenties and early thirties, they continued talking till it was time to drive the yaks back home.

Time passed. Unexpectedly Badtso told her grandmother she had decided to marry her current boyfriend. Her grandmother was curious, "Are you sure? Is he a good man?"

"I'm sure. We started the relationship six months ago. He's kind to me and has never been angry with me."

"You know a couple recently divorced after a decade of marriage and three children. The husband had an affair for three years. Be careful. Don't marry the

wrong man."

"I'm not like you."

Badma ignored this, knowing a serious squabble would ensue if she responded.

After a long absence, Badlo returned home at the wheel of a white four-door car. Locals came to see the car. Some flattered, "When you drive this car, you are so handsome!"

Badlo was called "Frogeyes" by locals because of his big, bulging eyes. He was short, fat, and limped due to a bullet lodged in his right leg during a conflict with a neighboring tribe some years earlier. After the visitors finished inspecting the car, they all entered the house, except for one man who planned to build a house for his family the following year. While he circled Badlo's house, carefully inspecting its construction details, he noticed something wrapped in black cloth lying near the outside of the house. He picked it up and was shocked to discover a dead baby wrapped in blood-stained cloth with a bit of hair on its head.

News quickly spread through the tribe of a dead infant discarded at the back of Badlo's family's house.

Badtso and her boyfriend had agreed to discuss a date for their wedding the next day. Badtso got up early, washed her face, gazed into the mirror, and plucked a hair from her right cheek. Looking at her round double-lidded eyes, high straight nose, and long face, she was proud of her beauty. She put on a new red shirt and fabric robe and consulted the mirror again.

A few minutes later, she mounted a black yak with a single white spot on its head, smiled, and drove the family's yaks into a valley.

She waited for her boyfriend the whole day.

He never came.

Badma learned the identity of the dead infant's mother and asked Badtso, "Shall we tell others the truth about the mother of the dead infant?"

"There's no reason to hurt another young woman."

"If you don't tell the truth, no one will marry you. We should tell others you are not the dead infant's mother," explained Badma.

"I already lost my lover. Who am I supposed to marry? I don't want the engaged young woman to lose her lover. She loves him."

Badma stared at her granddaughter and regretted questioning her decision to marry her boyfriend. "I've destroyed her life and marriage, and it's too late now," she thought.

Badma was sure she couldn't persuade Badtso and prayed for the day locals would discover the truth.

A month passed.

One night, Badlo scolded his daughter, "How shameful!"

When Badtso saw her father's angry face, she silently kept her head down.

Noticing tears streaming down her granddaughter's cheeks, Badma felt compelled to intervene and declared, "She's innocent. Trust your mother and daughter instead of others who will say whatever they like, distorting the truth and hurting others! You will only torture yourself if you trust others' every word."

Badlo's only response was to stop eating supper, get up, and limp to his bedroom. Badma and her granddaughter had also lost interest in eating and left half of their rice noodles with beef in their metal bowls and went to bed. Badma sat on her bed for a while, thinking before sleeping.

The next day was rainy and chilly. As Badtso was milking the family's yaks, she noticed her father climbing a wooden ladder that construction workers had left. She imagined the roof was leaking again. Suddenly, she saw Badlo slip off the ladder and hit the ground with a loud plop. As she shouted for her grandmother, her wooden bucket turned over on the muddy ground, forming a jagged white circle of milk.

The two women were terrified when white foam bubbled from Badlo's mouth. Distressed and at a loss, they watched him for a few minutes until he opened his eyes. Unable to speak, Badma grabbed her son's left arm while Badtso held his right arm. They pulled him into the house, his legs dragging, leaving a trail behind. After getting him into bed, Badma put a Buddha image near his head and patted it with a scripture volume.

Several hours later, Badlo could speak a little. He reassured them he was fine and there was no need to go to the local clinic.

A few days later, Badlo unexpectedly passed away.

After her son's death, Badma occasionally refused to eat supper and said she was not hungry. As more days passed, Badma's eyes were sunken, her cheekbones were prominent, and her forehead wrinkles deepened. Though Badtso urged her grandmother to eat, she ate very little.

Winter came.

One snowy morning, Badtso got up early as usual and drove the family's yaks to the mountains. A little later, when Badma put on her robe and went out to pee, she tripped on the doorsill and fell, hitting her head on a stone. She was unconscious as blood trickled from her head wound, turning the stone crimson.

When Badtso returned home for breakfast, she saw her grandmother sprawled on the ground. Tall and robust, Badtso carried Badma into the house and put her in bed. As she used her sleeve to wipe dried blood from the left side of her head, she gazed at her grandmother's pale face and hugged her. Wincing in agony, Badma said her left ribs were very painful.

The next day, a gambler, one of Badma's cousins, visited and suggested Badma stay home because the road to the clinic was terrible, and she would be in agony, given her bruised ribs. Adding that broken ribs were not a severe issue, he announced that he would drive Badlo's car to the clinic and bring a doctor back.

Badma and her granddaughter waited. Darkness fell.

Nobody came.

The following day, Badma's health had further deteriorated. Her lips were dry, and her face was pale. She lay on one side in her bed the whole day, covered by her sheep-skin robe. Her granddaughter cooked beef soup in the morning. When she offered Badma a bowl, Badma's hands shook, so Badtso held the bowl. After a few sips, Badma lay back down and put her head on a pillow of folded sheep-skin that Badtso had worn when she was five years old. Sweat appeared on her wrinkled forehead, and she could not speak.

Three days passed. No doctors came, nor did the cousin return. The grandmother's situation worsened, and then she died.

Badtso now lived alone. Locals continued gossiping about her. A woman sympathized and regretted she had destroyed Badtso's reputation to save herself but dared not acknowledge the truth.


Badtso explained to a night visitor that she didn't want locals to hurt another woman, so she had not told the truth to the man who was the dead infant's father. The man listened sympathetically and suggested that her father and grandmother's deaths were related to the house.

...

Some months later, Badtso lived alone in a small tent near her gambler cousin's family's tent. The Tent Tribe's tents were scattered at the bottom of a high mountain. The now-abandoned house was located at the border of the Tent Tribe's territory, far from the tents. Its windows and door lock were broken. The wind swung the squeaking door back and forth on rusty, unoiled hinges.

26

AN UNCLEAN BLOODLINE?

 Drashi was a good-looking Tibetan university student of twenty-five. Dressed fashionably, he was full of sexual desire and had a lot of fun with adorable girls of different ethnicities.

Lhamo felt Drashi loved her and decided to devote her life to him. They chatted gaily through WeChat voice calls for the first three months in a relationship that was not yet consummated.

One night, Lhamo unexpectedly announced she wanted to break up. Drashi burst into laughter and jumped up in exhilaration. It was the most joyful breakup he had ever experienced. He laughed madly until, suddenly, an inexplicable feeling consumed him. He ruminated over this strange feeling, grew tired, and slept. As he slept, he dreamed of Lhamo, saying, "The feeling of falling in love makes me want to tell everything I ever experienced to my lover!"

...

Lhamo was the fifth and youngest child of Tibetan herders who had no sons. Her mother gave up hope for a son after Lhamo's birth, reverently accepting that the Three Jewels had no mercy for her suffering from having no son.

Life can have hope! A suitor presented himself to the oldest daughter, ten years older than Lhamo. The mother assumed they would have grandsons and thus vanquish rumors of an unclean bloodline that others used to explain why she had only daughters. As soon as she received the good news of her oldest daughter's pregnancy, the mother beseeched various deities and worshipped and prostrated to the Three Jewels early every morning.

At breakfast, the mother routinely said to her family, "I'm sure this time the Three Jewels will have mercy on our poor family because I dreamt my oldest daughter gave birth to a son bringing happiness to our family."

The months passed, and as the mother carded and spun yak hair on one side of the door to their home, Lhamo rotated a prayer wheel on the other. Lhamo wanted to comfort her mother and sometimes wanted to say something to alleviate her apparent depression but found nothing to say. Lhamo understood what a disappointment the infant granddaughter was.

...

When she was six, and it was time to enroll in a local boarding primary school, Lhamo had insisted that her mother cut her hair like a boy's. At school, the students observed her strange behavior. She dressed like a boy and fought the few boys who dared fight

her. Sometimes, girls shouted and ran when she entered the female toilet, thinking a boy would attack them.

Over time, most students and even a teacher treated her like a boy asking her to be the class monitor. Some of her boy classmates could not accept such female leadership and were sure their parents and peers would be critical of them for having a girl monitor and wonder why a boy didn't have that position. The boys protested to their teacher, claiming it was improper for Lhamo to be the monitor. This did not work. They were clever boys, and they all agreed never to tell their parents that their monitor was a girl.

Lhamo hated school holidays.

One summer vacation, her uncle visited her home and urged her to behave like a girl. He was embarrassed and uncomfortable when he heard locals rumoring that Lhamo must be insane for acting like a boy. Lhamo's third and fourth single sisters also worried Lhamo would add to their family's notorious reputation for not having sons, and then definitely no one would propose to them. They somehow hated her but flattered, "Lhamo, your hauntingly beautiful appearance attracts local young men. It's time you act like a woman, catch a handsome boy, and marry him."

Lhamo knew they disdained her but endured it. Otherwise, they would bicker, leading to more local gossip and belittling.

Lhamo wanted to grow up quickly when she saw local young guys on motorcycles, their parents and siblings behind them as they headed to community gatherings. She longed for the day she would drive a motorcycle with her mother and two unmarried sisters seated behind her.

Time brought more pressure.

...

Lhamo was twenty-three. Her third and fourth sisters were still unmarried, and her mother had been diagnosed with lung cancer. As her illness worsened, the mother knew death would come soon. She asked Lhamo to be responsible for the family and urged her to marry as soon as possible. Lhamo considered marriage and sometimes worried that no one would marry her because of her masculine behavior.

Shortly before she stopped breathing the following year, her mother whispered to Lhamo.

Lhamo fell in love with her schoolmate in the first semester of her fourth year at college. Drashi was from her community. They had first met one cool night at their college when stars were glimmering. Drashi squatted under an aspen as a breeze blew his hair up from his forehead. His attractive appearance drew her attention. Unconsciously, she touched his hand and said, "Are you okay? May I escort you to the school clinic?"

Her warm hand refreshed and released him from the sorrow of breaking up with his latest girlfriend. A strange feeling pierced his heart. He lifted his head and beheld Lhamo's natural smile, plump face, rosy cheeks, and dark eyes. A second later, he said, "I'm fine. Nothing's wrong with me."

After chatting for a while, Drashi stood, took a few steps, but returned and looked at her again. Finding her adorable, he asked for her phone number.

He never forgot the feeling of Lhamo touching his hand and sharing companionship with him that night. Over time, he learned that she was a virgin. At first, he did not believe her, but he was convinced and more interested in her when she swore an oath that she was. Sleeping with a virgin would make him more of a real man to his fellows. His friends admired his good looks but would think even more of him if he could convincingly claim he had slept with a virgin.

Two weeks later, when Lhamo felt Drashi loved her, she decided to marry him but hesitated to tell him about her family background. "He will think my family is evil if I tell him I am one of five daughters and have no brothers and no living parents," she reasoned.

Eventually, she told him her story, hoping he would better understand her. She also hoped he would now tell her about his family.

Drashi knew his very traditional father would scold him if he informed him of his relationship with Lhamo. After learning the truth about her family, he wanted to stop contacting her. Still, at the same time, he felt pity and did not want to hurt her, so he reluctantly maintained the relationship, hoping she would lose interest and end it. They rarely met at school. He was concerned about being trapped if he had sex with her but also hoped to have fun with her at least once.

She hesitated about sex, especially after her friends confided their experiences of sleeping with their first lovers, who then disappeared, or with whom they had broken up. Her friends regretted what they'd done. However, she was convinced that Drashi was different, that he was kind and would not hurt her.

Drashi didn't tell his friends about Lhamo and their relationship until one night of drinking in their dorm room when he revealed all. His roommates burst into laughter when he said, "I heard Lhamo is a virgin!"

They all assumed Drashi was in love and began teasing, "Virgin! Great! You can do something you've never done - sleep with a virgin."

"You know, your brother is a real man and has slept with thirteen virgins. You should be like him!" one exclaimed.

They all laughed and continued making jokes.

One of his roommates was often jealous when Drashi made a new girlfriend and offered, "You have fallen in love with a weird, muscular girl. Maybe she doesn't have a vagina."

Silence locked the room.

His roommate giggled and continued, "I heard her family has five daughters, no sons, and her mother never married. Don't you guys think this is odd and ominous?"

Drashi kept his head down and said nothing.

Four months later, Lhamo was ready, phoned Drashi, and waited for him at the school sports field until eleven PM. She was deeply hurt when he didn't show up

and decided to break up. When she returned to her dorm, she called him, expecting him to reject her announcement, but instead, he agreed to her great surprise.


Later that night, Drashi woke up from a dream that had ended with Lhamo's mother whispering, "Dear Lhamo, I know you acted like a boy to make me feel better. My life has taught me that women are as important as men. Be a real woman! ... Dear Lhamo, always remember that our family is not evil!"

Drashi wiped his sweaty forehead, sat up, lit a cigarette, and tried to get rid of the dream, but he couldn't. "Women are as important as men. Be a real woman, not a man! ... Dear Lhamo, always remember that our family is not evil!" was stuck in his mind, repeating, again and again.

The next day, he called her many times. There was no answer, plunging him into severe psychological turmoil.

27

BIGMOUTH KIDS

 'm Tseyangtso. Locals thought I was lucky to be born into a wealthy family with good parents. My mother was the most respected woman in her community, never disobeying her mother, who arranged her marriage. My father was bold, and the locals respected him. Some of my relations thought I would be as filial and respectful as my parents, who would find a good man for me and arrange my marriage. In fact, I had no idea what kind of woman I would be.

...

Local children yearned to visit their grandparents, and Tseyangtso, an eight-year-old herding child, was no exception. When they visited, she had heard her grandparents gave their grandchildren that rare treat - sugar crystals.

A few days earlier, Tseyangtso's younger brother, six-year-old Dechok, visited his grandmother, Lhamo, with their mother, Badtso. Dechok returned home with a big piece of crystal sugar, broke off a little piece, and gave it to his sister when she asked. She sucked on it until it dissolved and pronounced it the most delicious sugar she had ever tasted. He refused when she asked for more, so she whined to her mother, "Why don't you take me to visit Grandmother?"

Badtso promised to take her to visit her next time - a promise she didn't keep, but for a good reason.

Years later, after her marriage, Tseyangtso visited her grandmother for the first time with Badtso.

...

One summer day, Tseyangtso and Dechok played near a small pool close to their family tent. Tseyangtso rolled the legs of her red pants over her knees, removed her shoes, placed them on a flat rock, and walked into the pool. Imitating her, Dechok kicked off his shoes, rolled up his pants, and bounded into the pool, splashing water over his sister's plump face.

Tseyangtso punched his shoulder in exasperation. Ignoring her, he waded further into the pool until he slipped on a small round stone and lost his balance, almost falling into the water. Catching sight of a frog, he exclaimed, "Sister! There's a frog!"

Tseyangtso walked near him and asked, "Where's that frog?"

He pointed, "Over there. Don't you see it?"

Seeing a brown-white, black-striped frog in a yak-hoof hole, his sister exclaimed, "Yes, there it is!"

Dechok quickly swooped his hand into the water, caught the frog, and held it in his right palm. After a few seconds, he opened his palm, where the frog sat quietly. "What a gentle frog!" Dechok commented, stretching out his hand, intending to give it to Tseyangtso. Given this opportunity, the frog leaped into the water. Dechok caught the frog again, grabbed one of its hind legs, and while swinging it right and left, threatened, "I'll kill you if you dare jump into the water again!" and flung it into the grass.

Dechok and Tseyangtso walked over and tried to catch it again as the frog hopped toward the pool. Just as the frog made a final leap into the pool, Dechok picked up a dried chunk of yak dung and flung it at the frog. The frog rolled over and floated on the water surface without moving a second later - a white belly with motionless outstretched legs.

Tseyangtso shouted accusingly, "It's dead. You killed it!"

"No, it's just enjoying floating on the water."

"It's still. It's dead!" Tseyangtso continued.

Dechok sprang into the water and turned the frog onto its belly, but when he removed his hand, it rolled over, belly-up, proving it was dead.

Dechok walked out of the water and sat next to his sister as she put her shoes on. He stared at her for a second and pleaded, "Sister! Don't tell our parents I killed a frog. They'll beat me if you do!"

She rolled down her pants legs and said, "Okay."

Dechok looked at her pleadingly, "Promise?"

Looking back at him, she affirmed, "I promise I won't tell our parents you killed a frog."

Feeling more confident, Dechok walked over to his shoes, slipped them on, and ran after his sister.

Badtso was standing at the tent entrance. Once she saw her two children heading home, she went inside, added dry yak dung to the adobe stove, and put a kettle on the stove.

The kids entered and sat on either side of their mother. Tseyangtso leaned against Badtso, declaring, "I'm hungry!"

Dechok chimed in, "Me too!"

Their mother looked at the kettle on the stove and said, "Just wait a few minutes. The tea will boil soon."

Tseyangtso put her head on her mother's lap and pleaded, "I can't wait! I've got to eat something right now!"

"What did you do at the pool?"

Tseyangtso sat straight, looked at her mother, and replied, "Nothing."

Dechok quickly added, "We played in the water," without daring to raise his eyes.

Badtso felt something was amiss, looked at him, and inquired, "What did *you* do?"

Dechok silently interlaced his fingers.

The tea soon boiled. Badtso removed the kettle, placed it on the ground, and took the children's bowls from an adobe box near the stove. Opening a wooden box containing roasted barley flour, butter, and cheese, she took out a chunk of butter, pulled off two small pieces, and added them to the bowls. She put the remaining butter back in the box and replaced the lid. The butter melted immediately when the hot milk tea was poured into the children's bowls, spiraling out in yellow rings. After handing the children their bowls, she took three bread buns from a pot and put them on a plate she set between them. Each child grabbed a bun, pinching small pieces from the buns and soaking them in their bowls before eating them.

Having gobbled up his bun before his sister had finished even half of hers, Dechok took the last bun left on the plate. Tseyangtso noticed and protested, "Give it to me! I'll eat it!"

Ignoring her, Dechok bit into the bun. Infuriated, his sister declared, "Mother, Dechok killed a frog in the pool today!"

Dechok handed the bun to his sister as Badtso glowered and demanded, "Did you kill a frog?"

As he silently gazed in return, Badtso tried to slap him, but he covered his head with his arms and moaned, "Mother, I'll never kill another frog!"

Badtso warned, "I'll kill you if you do!"

He nodded, not daring to look at her as she removed more buns from the pot, put them on the plate, and urged, "Eat more."

Dechok picked up a bun, bit off a piece, and quietly chewed it.

At sunset, as Tseyangtso and Dechok were playing near their family tent, their father, Gyatso, came riding a yak while driving the family's yaks down from the mountains. Tseyangtso ran over and helped him drive them into the enclosure. Dechok watched his sister and wanted to join her, but he was anxious she would tell their father he had killed a frog, so he walked over to the tent as his mother emerged. He followed her and helped drive the yaks into the yak enclosure.

Badtso tied the milking yaks and their calves. Dechok tried to help, not going near his father, who was tying some riding yaks. He was sure his sister had already tattled. Once they finished tethering the yaks, they entered the tent.

When it was dark, Gyatso lit a butter lamp and placed it on the stone-earth shrine at the back of the tent, where there were a few images of deities and important religious figures. The lamp brightened the tent as Badtso added dry yak dung to the stove. A few minutes later, as the dung burned energetically, Dechok sat by his parents while Tseyangtso sat on the other side of the tent.

Shortly after, Gyatso ordered, "Dechok, come here." Dechok stood and dragged himself to his father. When local elders and parents noticed a child was guilty of something, they smelled the child's hand and pretended to know what the child had done from the hand's odor. Gyatso looked at him and ordered, "Give me your hand."

Dechok offered his hand, which Gyatso sniffed, demanding, "What have you done today?"

With a pained expression, Dechok whispered, "Nothing."

"What did you say? I can't hear you."

"I've done nothing."

His father sniffed his hand again and intoned, "What did you kill today?"

Dechok remained silent, so his father spanked him, "What a sinful boy! Will you kill frogs again?"

Wiping away his tears, Dechok promised never ever to do such a thing again.

Tseyangtso felt sorry for her brother. She didn't want her father to beat him, but she was afraid, so she said nothing.

His father spanked him again, shouting, "Don't sob!"

Dechok stopped crying, walked to his mother, and, sitting by her, sobbed for a few minutes as she stroked his head and whispered, "Don't cry. I'll prepare noodles for you."

Badtso cooked noodles with beef that night, and Dechok ate two bowls. He didn't look at his father or say a word during the meal. He usually slept with his father but slept with his mother that night.

After breakfast and after Badtso finished milking the yaks the following day, Gyatso mounted a black yak and drove the family's yaks to the mountains.

Badtso carried two buckets full of milk into the tent and placed them on one side. Taking dry yak dung used for fuel from a pile inside the tent entrance, she added it to the stove and woke up Dechok. He rubbed his eyes, yawned, and stretched his arms. Badtso said, "I'll go collect fresh yak dung. Add dry dung to the stove when the fire gets low."

Yawning again, Dechok agreed and asked, "Where's my sister?"

"She's playing with Dongnyi near his family's tent."

Badtso kissed his forehead and left.

Dechok stood near his family's tent at noon and watched his sister chase the neighbor boy, Dongnyi, near his tent. Dongnyi was a year younger than Tseyangtso, who ran faster than he did. When she caught up with him, she grabbed his shoulder, pushed him forward, and then let go, which sent Dongnyi tumbling to the ground. Tseyangtso stood by Dongnyi for a minute until he got up and ran to his family's tent with Tseyangtso in hot pursuit.

A minute later, Tseyangtso came out and ran to her family's tent, about 300 meters away. She ran the entire distance and entered her family's tent, panting heavily, with Dechok just behind her.

Badtso was napping on a pad on one side of the tent. Tseyangtso shook her mother's shoulder, anxiously announcing, "Mother! Nekyab was beating Tsetso. He grabbed her hair and ..."

Badtso said, "Don't exaggerate!"

Dechok was now standing by his sister, gazing at her.

Tseyangtso continued, "He was drunk, snatched her hair while she was on the ground, and beat her back as Dongnyi and I watched. Dongnyi cried, so Nekyab stopped."

"You should have begged Nekyab to stop beating her!" responded Badtso.

"Nekyab angrily glared at me, scaring me, so I ran back here."

"Coward!" declared Badtso, not taking this report very seriously because Nekyab and Tsetso often quarreled.

Badtso put her head back on a pillow fashioned from a folded robe and resumed napping. Tseyangtso and Dechok lingered near their mother and then went outside to play.

In the early evening, Badtso left the tent when her family's watchdog barked, announcing Tsetso's approach. Badtso picked up a piece of dry yak dung and threw it at the chained dog, frenziedly barking several meters from the tent. Once the dog quieted, she greeted Tsetso, and they walked into the tent together. Once Tsetso sat, Badtso poured and offered her a bowl of milk tea. After sipping it, Tsetso set the bowl in front of her.

Sitting by Tsetso, Badtso noticed her swollen eyes. Guessing Tsetso had cried for a long time, she asked, "What happened to you?"

Tsetso received the bowl, sipped the tea, and spoke. "My husband and I quarreled," she said without mentioning he had beaten her, but Badtso understood.

"Tseyangtso told me about that. Did you do something wrong?"

"No."

"Why did he beat you?"

"He was drunk. He told me to pour him a bowl of water. I was busy making dumplings and didn't pour it fast enough to suit him. He got angry."

"Liquor makes people evil. He should quit."

"His parents have urged him countless times to stop, but he's addicted and can't."

"It's hard to live with a heavy drinker."

"We often quarrel when he's drunk. I'm so tired of this. I want to divorce him sometimes."

"Quarreling is normal. Every couple quarrels, but a husband beating his wife is no good."

"It's okay if a husband beats his wife a few times."

"That's understandable. Who is perfect? Everyone makes mistakes. You have an adorable son. You shouldn't divorce. Your life will be better when your son gets older."

"I often think how my son would suffer if his parents divorced and lived separately."

"Right."

Tseyangtso came in and sat near Tsetso, who stroked her head and affectionately said, "What a bigmouth!"

Tseyangtso smiled and said nothing. Her mother looked at her and said, "She tells everything she hears and sees. She's got a really big mouth."

After sipping her tea, Tsetso declared, "I'm leaving. I must drive our yaks back home from the mountains."

"Stay a bit. I'll fix something," encouraged Badtso.

"Thanks, but I'm not hungry."

As the two left the tent, Badtso walked over to stop the dog from barking at Tsetso.

A sunny afternoon a few days later, Badtso emerged from her family's tent after churning milk. Seeing her children playing near the pool, she was reassured that they were not killing and torturing frogs. She shouted, and they reluctantly came home.

One early autumn afternoon two years later, the family's watchdog barked frenetically as a horse rider approached their tent. Gyatso came out and, realizing Denba, the tribe's leader, was coming, picked up a stone and threw it at the watchdog to stop it from barking. After Denba dismounted and tied his horse to a stake, Gyatso greeted, "How are you?"

"Good. Your family's watchdog is intimidating!"

"Don't be scared. It never bites people, even if it is unchained."

"It looks like a good dog."

"Let's go inside the tent."

Badtso came out when she heard her husband and someone talking, smiled at the leader, and welcomed, "How are you?"

"Good," Denba again replied as they entered the tent.

Taking a pad from the lower part of the tent, Gyatso put it near the stove and invited Denba to sit on it.

"I'd prefer to sit on the ground without a cushion," Denba replied as he lowered himself.

"Don't sit on the ground," protested Gyatso, so Denba obliged and sat on the pad.

Gyatso sat by Denba and asked Badtso to offer their guest some tea.

"Sure," replied Badtso as she cleaned a bowl with a new towel, poured milk tea into the bowl, and handed it to Denba over the stove. "Have some tea."

Gyatso repeated, "Have some tea," turned to Badtso and ordered, "Cook something."

Badtso nodded as she offered a bowl of tea to her husband.

"What brings you here?" asked Gyatso.

"The local government clerk told me to inform you that your daughter should start school a few days later."

"She hates the very idea of school. Last year when I asked her to go to school, she told me she preferred to herd yaks."

"Why is she so against attending school?"

"Maybe she's just not fated for that kind of education."

Badtso added while kneading dough in a basin, "Poor girl! I urged her to attend school. I explained school life is far superior to herding life. She doesn't listen and says she would miss home."

"She won't go to school. What should we do?" Gyatso asked.

"The government will fine you if she doesn't go."

"Is it okay to send our son in place of our daughter?"

"That's okay."

"Great! I'll send him to school. Nekyab has decided to send his son, who often plays with my son. They like each other. It's good they'll go to school together."

"That's right."

They continued chatting and sipping tea while Badtso prepared beef with noodles. Once she finished, she offered noodles to the leader and her husband and went outside, looking for her children. Seeing them playing with Dongnyi near a riverbank, she shouted, "Come eat! Noodles!"

"Okay!" they responded.

Badtso returned to the tent, and a few minutes later, Tseyangtso, Dechok, and Dongnyi rushed inside, shyly hiding their mud-smudged faces when they noticed Denba in the tent. They quickly sat by Badtso, their heads a little lower than usual and carefully positioned behind the stovepipe, hiding them from Denba's gaze. Badtso offered each child a pair of chopsticks and a bowl of noodles, which they ate quickly but quietly.

After eating, Denba said to Tseyangtso, "I came to take you to school. Will you go?"

She sat quietly and didn't respond, then ran to the neighbor's tent, where she wiggled and squirmed under a pile of robes and wool blankets. For at least an hour, she didn't move and was utterly silent. Finally, Dongnyi came inside, calling, "Tseyangtso, where are you? The leader's gone." Tseyangtso poked her head out from the robes and blankets. Sweat pouring down her red cheeks, she got up, walked to the tent entrance, and peeped outside to ensure the leader was truly gone. Seeing neither Denba nor his horse, she relaxed, played with Dongnyi until dark, and then went home.

That night, Tseyangtso sat by her mother on one side of the tent while her father and brother sat opposite. When her mother directed, she added yak dung to the fire.

Gyatso looked at her and asked, "Are you not going to attend school?"

She paused, looked at her mother, and then at the kettle on the stove. "I'm not going to school," she confirmed adamantly.

"Are you sure?" Gyatso asked.

"Yes."

"I'll send Dechok in your place."

Not daring to make eye contact with her father, Tseyangtso nodded. After dinner, they went to bed.

A few days later, it was an auspicious day. Dechok got up earlier than usual and washed his feet, face, and hands. He put on new clothes - a white shirt, a blue jacket, new blue jeans, black socks, and leather shoes - all bought by his father from a local town shop. Finally, he wrapped himself in a new fabric robe made by his mother.

After breakfast, his father saddled a white horse while Dechok put notebooks, several pencils, a pencil sharpener, an eraser, and two pens inside a new yellow schoolbag, slung it on his back, and left the tent. Nekyab was on a black horse, riding toward the tent. Dongnyi, sitting behind his father, was clad in a new gray robe and red cap and had a yellow schoolbag on his back.

As Dechok ran over to his father, his mother and sister stopped milking yaks and came to say goodbye. His mother lifted him, put him behind his father, and then they rode off in the direction of the local town.

Tseyangtso watched them until they faded from view and then returned to help her mother milk. Once finished, and after breakfast, Tseyangtso mounted a yak and drove the family's yaks to the mountains. She was now a real herder.

After dinner, Badtso and Tseyangtso waited for Gyatso to return from town. While sitting by her mother, Tseyangtso dozed for a bit and said, "Mother, shall we go to bed? I'm sleepy."

"Wait half an hour. Your father must be hungry. We can't go to bed until we offer him dinner."

"Okay."

"Next time we go to the township town, I'll buy candies for you. Would you like that?"

"No, I want to visit Grandmother with you. When will you take me? You promised to take me, but you didn't."

"I'll take you the next time I visit her."

"How long does it take to go from here to Grandmother's home?"

"Two days by horse."

"That's a long way! Are there wolves along the way?"

"Yes."

"Scary!"

"Do you still want to visit your grandmother?"

"Yes! I'm not afraid of wolves if I'm with you."

Suddenly the family's watchdog barked, announcing Gyatso's return. Badtso picked up a flashlight and went out with Tseyangtso. Gyatso dismounted near the tent, unsaddled his horse, removed the bridle, and released the horse. They returned to the tent, with Badtso carrying the saddle and Tseyangtso holding the bridle.

Gyatso sat near the stove, pulled a pair of fabric shoes from his robe pouch, and handed them to Tseyangtso, saying, "These are for you. Try them on and see if

they fit."

Removing her old, tattered pair, Tseyangtso slipped on the new ones and pronounced, "They fit."

When she tried to put the old shoes back on, her mother said, "Don't wear those old shoes. Others will think we're a poor family if you do. Wear the new ones. Throw away those old worn-out ones."

Badtso offered Gyatso a bowl of rice noodles and a glass of hot milk tea. After he finished two bowls of rice noodles, they went to bed.

A few days later, when Tseyangtso came home for lunch from a mountain where she was herding her family's yaks, she entered the family tent to find her mother sobbing on one side and, on the other, her angry-faced father. Badtso's hair was disheveled. Her right cheek was severely swollen. Sitting by her mother, Tseyangtso gently and quietly asked, "What happened?"

Wiping her tears, her mother said, "Nothing. Help yourself. Eat something."

Tears filled Tseyangtso's luminous eyes as she looked at her mother's swollen face. Gyatso's uneven breathing and her mother's sobs were the only sounds.

When Tseyangtso stepped out of the tent after lunch, her mother followed, assuring her, "I'm okay. Don't worry about me. Don't tell others your father beat me. Telling others will hurt our family's reputation. How shameful."

Tseyangtso nodded, walked to her riding yak tied up in the yak enclosure, mounted it, and rode back into the mountains where the yaks were grazing.

Five days later, Badtso saw a horse rider leading a packhorse riding toward her as she sat near her family tent. When the rider neared, she realized it was her brother, Dondrub. She rushed to him. "Brother! How are you? I'm so glad you've come to visit!" she gushed.

"Good. How are you?" Dondrub replied.

"Good. Everything's going well."

Gyatso came out of the tent and, seeing Dondrub asked, "How are you?"

"Good. How are you?"

"Good," answered Gyatso as he walked to Dondrub, unsaddled his horse, and handed the reins to Badtso, who tied the horses to a stake.

Once in the tent, Dondrub and Gyatso sat while Badtso served milk tea and fried bread on a plate and warmed leftover noodles in a pot. Gyatso chided Badtso, "Don't offer leftovers. Boil some meat for him."

"It's okay. I prefer noodles," Dondrub said

Badtso asked, "What brought you here?"

Looking at his sister, Dondrub said, "Our mother asked me to visit and bring you to her home if you're free."

As a big smile spread across her face, she glanced hopefully at Gyatso, who said nothing. After an awkward pause, Dondrub asked Gyatso, "Is she free these days?"

"Yes."

"Great. After a few days with our mother, I'll bring her back home?"

Gyatso agreed.

"We'll leave tomorrow morning," announced Dondrub.

Badtso thought and suggested, "We can leave today."

Gyatso decided, "It's better to leave tomorrow. Let your brother stay here and rest today."

Badtso continued, "It's better to leave today, or Tseyangtso will beg to come with us."

"That's okay. She can come with us," Dondrub said.

Badtso protested, "No. She needs to herd our yaks."

Dondrub then agreed that they leave that day.

Gyatso said, "My family's horses are on the mountain. Badtso has no horse to ride."

"She can ride my other horse," suggested Dondrub.

Gyatso again agreed.

The noodles were hot by this time, so she served a bowl to her brother, a bowl to her husband, and had one bowl herself before changing into a warm, clean robe and pulling on a pair of leather shoes. She put fried bread they would eat on the way into an empty bag. As she wrapped a bowl in a towel, her brother noticed and said, "No need to bring a bowl and food. I packed food and two plastic bowls on the packhorse."

"But we can bring some fried bread," suggested Badtso.

"Yes, that's good," agreed Dondrub.

After Dondrub finished eating, they went outside with two blankets, a saddlebag, a kettle, and two plastic bowls. Badtso and Gyatso unpacked the horse. Dondrub folded one blanket, put it over his riding horse's saddle, and put a saddlebag over it. Gyatso put the other blanket over the other horse's saddle. Dondrub mounted his horse, and Badtso got on the other.

Dondrub told Gyatso, "We'll be back in six days."

"Okay, be careful on the way," Gyatso said as they rode away.

At sunset, Tseyangtso drove her family's yaks home. She found her father adding dung to the stove when she entered the tent. "Father, where's Mother?" she asked.

"Your uncle Dondrub visited this morning and is accompanying her to your grandmother's home."

Puzzled as to why her mother hadn't taken her, tears filled her eyes. She exclaimed, "Mother lied! She promised to take me with her the next time she visited her mother!"

Trying to distract her, Gyatso suggested, "You must be hungry. Eat some fried bread. The tea is warm."

After having bread and a bowl of milk tea, Tseyangtso went out and drove the

Seven days later, after driving the family's yaks back home at sunset, Tseyangtso entered her tent and found her mother clad in a new robe, sitting in the tent. Sitting near her, she scolded, "Liar, you promised I could visit Grandmother! Oh, where's Father?"

"He's visiting a neighbor family," replied Badtso. She handed Tseyangtso a small pack of crystal sugar, saying, "Your grandmother sent this and scolded me for not bringing you."

Tseyangtso pouted, "I don't need it."

"Fine, I'll give it to your brother when he returns from school."

Tseyangtso snatched it and asked, "How did you return from Grandmother's home?"

"Your uncle, Dondrub, brought me back."

"Where's Uncle Dondrub?"

"We got home at noon. He had lunch and left."

Tseyangtso said, "I see," thought for a bit, and asked, "Why don't you take me to visit Grandmother?"

Badtso silently left the tent. Tseyangtso put the pack of sugar in her robe pouch, walked out of the tent, and helped her mother drive the yaks into the yak enclosure.

Thirteen years later, Gyatso's family built an adobe house in their winter pasture. When Tseyangtso turned twenty, Badtso worried others would say she was too old to be unmarried, so she encouraged her to marry Dorje, the local leader's son. Badtso started, "Denba is a good man, so his son must be..." but Tseyangtso interrupted, "You marry him if you think he's a good man."

"I meant that a good father has a good son. Dorje is a fine man, so you should marry him."

"Maybe he's a good man, but I won't marry him."

Badtso then gave up making suggestions about who she should marry. This disagreement created a distance between mother and daughter, especially when Tseyangtso learned that Denba's wife, Dzombe, her mother's best friend, had been the one to suggest Tseyangtso marry Dorje. Tseyangtso assumed her mother had attempted to do a favor for her friend and didn't care much about her daughter's feelings because she had already told her she wanted to marry her lover.

Badtso got up early to collect fresh yak dung one chilly winter morning. She opened her daughter's bedroom door to wake her. No Tseyangtso, so she went outside and checked the yak enclosure. Tseyangtso wasn't there. She returned to the house and woke Gyatso, who slept in their bedroom adjoining Tseyangtso's bedroom. Pulling the blanket covering Gyatso, she announced, "Tseyangtso's gone."

"What?" asked her husband, raising his head.

"I checked Tseyangtso's bedroom and our yak enclosure. She's gone. She disappeared."

"What's happened? Where could she have gone? Where can we find her?" asked her husband, getting up and donning his robe.

Badtso pondered and confided, "A few days ago, she told me she would marry Drogon. Maybe he has taken her to his home."

"Which Drogon?"

"Our community's Drogon."

"He's at least ten years older than her."

"Age doesn't matter in terms of marriage."

"Why didn't you tell me earlier? His family's not wealthy."

"Locals think he's a good man. Marrying a good man brings a woman happiness."

Gyatso grumbled, "Drogon's family only has around sixty yaks."

At noon, a man on a motorcycle arrived at Gyatso's tent. It was Drogon's maternal uncle, Dele. The couple came out and welcomed him into the house. Badtso served a bowl of milk tea and a plate of candies. Dele sipped the tea and said, "Drogon brought Tseyangtso to his home last night."

"Yeah, I guessed that," Gyatso said.

"I hope you approve of the marriage."

"I won't let my daughter marry far from my family. We are from the same community, so I won't worry much about her."

"That's right."

"I hope my daughter has a good life with your nephew's family."

"Don't worry. I'll tell my nephew to take good care of your daughter and be kind to her. I'll be responsible if he beats or is unkind to her."

They chatted until, finally, Dele took a *khadak* and a piece of silk cloth from his robe pouch and presented them to Gyatso, who accepted them, confirming he approved of the marriage. Dele then left.

...

A year later, Tseyangtso gave birth to a son. A local lama named him Drashi.

When Drashi turned six, Drogon sold all his family's yaks. Though his mother, Dekyi, warned him that selling many yaks was sinful, she couldn't convince him not to do it. He used the cash to buy a house in the local township town, and his family moved there. Drogon had learned basic math in his five years of primary school, so the family ran a small shop in town.

When Drogon was a child, his father had passed away.

Drogon's mother, Dekyi, was in her sixties and lived with them for several months before she got bored and conflicts ensued between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. When Tseyangtso told Dekyi about a married neighbor's affair with a local man and concluded the woman had betrayed her husband, this friction came to a head after Dekyi responded, "It's not good to gossip and judge others."

Tseyangtso didn't argue, but Dekyi read her angry face and a few days later announced she was old and it was time for her to do religious activities to accumulate merit for a better next life. She then moved to live with her older sister near the local monastery. Meanwhile, Drogon promised to build her a house near the monastery the following year.

A strong gust blew dirt into his eyes one windy evening while Drashi was playing in his family's backyard. Rubbing them, he rushed into his family's two-room house. The shop was one room, with beverages, candies, clothes, and some kitchen items on display. The other room was where his family lived, ate, and slept. When he entered the living room, he was shocked to see his father slapping and kicking his mother. He stared, dumbfounded. His father stopped when he saw Drashi, who silently walked to his weeping mother and sat by her.

Tseyangtso later cautioned Drashi, "Don't tell others your father beat me, or they'll think you have bad parents."

Sitting on her lap, he nodded and declared, "I'm hungry."

Tseyangtso brought a pack of biscuits from the shop room. Happily taking the package, Drashi assured her, "I won't tell anyone Father beat you."

Tseyangtso kissed him and said, "Good boy!"

The next day, while Dechok was on his winter holiday, he came to visit. Noticing Tseyangtso's swollen face, he asked, "What's wrong with your face?"

"A toothache has made my face swell."

Squirming on Dechok's lap, Drashi immediately chimed, "No! Father beat her! I saw him beat her yesterday."

Tseyangtso glared at her son and exclaimed, "What a bigmouth!"

Dechok inquired, "Where's Drogon?"

"He went to the county town to visit a seriously ill friend in the county town hospital."

"Why did he beat you?"

"Forget it. I'm okay. Don't tell our parents or they'll worry. I don't want them to be unhappy."

Dechok was angry, but he agreed.

When darkness fell, Dechok left for his home on his motorcycle.

...

One sunny spring day, Nekyab gave Badtso a ride in his car to Drogon's home in town. When he entered Drogon's shop, Badtso was met with, "You came shopping today?"

"Not really," she replied and went into the living room where Tseyangtso washed bowls in a basin. When she saw her mother, she asked, "You came shopping today?"

"No. Where's Drashi?"

"He's playing behind the house. What brought you here?"

Tseyangtso picked up a clean glass cup from a shelf, filled it with black tea, and offered it to her mother, who sat on an upholstered plastic-covered chair near a

window. Taking the glass, Badtso sipped the tea, put the glass on the table in front of her, and announced, "I'm going to the county town."

"What will you do there?"

While they chatted, Drogon brought a plate of candies, two cans of cola, a bottle of Sprite, and a bottle of peach-drink, set them on the table in front of Badtso, and encouraged her to help herself.

Thanking her, Badtso added, "I will visit my mother. Will you come with me?"

Tseyangtso looked at her husband, hopefully waiting for him to say something. When he didn't, she said, "I'm not free. Maybe I can visit Grandmother next time."

Drogon said, "Why not this time?"

"Really?"

"Sure. What about Drashi? Will you bring him with you?"

"No."

"We can take him with us."

"No, I'm spoiling him. When we reach the county town, he'll surely ask me to buy toys."

Tseyangtso said in a low voice to her mother, "We better leave now while Drashi doesn't know we are going to the county town."

She put on a nice robe, and Drogon handed her some cash. They walked to where private cars generally parked, waiting to fill a car with passengers to go to the county town. They reached the county town two hours later, where they bought candies, canned fruits, packages of crystal sugar, a jacket, and a shirt - all gifts for Lhamo. Then a driver drove them to Lhamo's house, near the monastery.

When they entered Lhamo's yard, they saw her sitting in a chair by the door of her house. Though she was in her late seventies, she looked younger, in her sixties. Badtso was reminded that her father had passed away when she was five.

When Lhamo saw them, she got up and walked over. Though Lhamo and Tseyangtso had never met, they instantly recognized each other. They had seen each other's photos. Lhamo held Tseyangtso's hand and said, "My granddaughter came to visit. I'm so glad!"

Tseyangtso didn't know what to say but smiled.

"Mother, how are you?" Badtso asked.

"I'm good. Let's go inside."

Lhamo's red brick house consisted of a bedroom and a big living room. When the visitors entered, they gave their gifts to Lhamo, who, although pleased, said, "You don't need to buy anything for me."

"Grandmother, they are just small gifts," Tseyangtso said.

Lhamo thanked them and then rinsed two bowls.

Badtso directed Tseyangtso, "Help your grandmother clean the bowls."

Tseyangtso walked over to her grandmother and offered, "Let me."

"I'll clean them. You're my guest. Have a seat, and I'll serve tea," replied

Lhamo.

Tseyangtso sat by her mother.

Lhamo offered a plate of fried bread and bowls of milk tea and, after going out to a small storeroom, brought back a bag of frozen yak ribs. She poured water into a pot, set it on the stove, added the ribs, and sprinkled some salt into the pot.

Lhamo refilled Badtso and Tseyangtso's bowls, poured tea into her own bowl, and sat next to Badtso. She asked Tseyangtso, "How's Drashi? Is he mischievous?"

"He's good. He's really naughty. I didn't bring him with me today," Tseyangtso said.

"I want to meet my great-grandson. Please bring him the next time you visit."

Tseyangtso assured her she would.

Lhamo asked, "How are your husband and his mother?"

"They're good."

"Good. How's Gyatso?" continued Lhamo.

Badtso said, "He's also good."

Lhamo went over to stir the meat and encouraged her guests to have some bread.

Both visitors helped themselves.

"Your families are good. That's great," Lhamo said.

After the water inside the pot had boiled for a few minutes, she took the pot from the stove and placed it near where she kept her kitchen items, in one corner of the living room near where she often sat. Transferring the meat into a plastic basin, she placed it between Badtso and Tseyangtso.

"Please have some meat," Lhamo said, handing them each a knife.

Lhamo selected a rib from the basin and handed it to Tseyangtso, saying, "Eat."

Tseyangtso took it, picked up a knife, and started eating.

Badtso cut a piece of meat from a rib and gave it to Lhamo, "Mother, eat this."

Lhamo said, "You two have more meat," and asked Tseyangtso, "Is your husband kind to you? Does he beat you?"

"He's kind and never beats me," replied Tseyangtso.

Badtso added, "Drogon's a good man. She's lucky she married him."

"I'm very glad she married a good man," Lhamo said and, looking at Badtso, continued, "You're also lucky. Your husband never beats you and is kind to you. I'm glad you two have good husbands."

Badtso agreed, "True. How important it is for a woman to marry a good man!"

As Tseyangtso nodded, Lhamo looked at her and asked, "Is your husband's mother kind to you?"

"Yes, she's kind to me. She lives with her sister."

Lhamo inquired, "Why doesn't she live with your family?"

Tseyangtso explained, "She lived with my family for some months after moving to our local township town and then decided it was time for her to

circumambulate the monastery and chant scriptures. It's convenient for her to live with her sister. Drogon promised he would build a house next year for her next to her sister's house."

"Good! Older people should chant scriptures," declared Lhamo and asked, "How's town life?"

"I don't need to herd yaks, so it's good," Tseyangtso answered.

Lhamo agreed, "Herding is hard work."

"Right," concurred Badtso.

They chatted until midnight.

Two days later, when they informed Lhamo they had to leave, she urged them to stay a few more days. Though they wanted to, they had to leave. If they stayed longer with Lhamo, their husbands would scold them when they returned. They said goodbye tearfully with promises to return and walked to the nearby road. There were no cars.

While waiting, Tseyangtso looked at her mother and said, "Finally, I have visited my grandmother."

"You're a good granddaughter," Badtso commented.

"Why didn't you bring me to visit her when I was a child?"

Badtso paused and explained, "When you were a child, you truthfully told others whatever you saw and heard. When I visited my mother, she asked, 'Is your husband kind to you? Does he beat you?' I always lied. You would have told the truth and made Mother unhappy if you had been with me. She arranged my marriage and worries a lot about me."

Tseyangtso nodded, now understanding. It also reminded her why she didn't bring her son to visit her grandmother. She was sure, given the chance, he would tell his great-grandmother and grandmother about Drogon beating her, making both her mother and grandmother unhappy.

They hailed a white car that was approaching. Tseyangtso leaned against her mother in the back seat. Thoughts raced through her mind for a while, and then she closed her eyes, lulled by the car's steady forward movement as it got closer to their homes.

28

COUPLES



A man in his early twenties sat in his usual place - an armchair framed by a wooden window in the café. It was the seat he always chose when he visited the tea house. In front of him sat a tall glass of tea on a large piece of clear glass atop a square table with wooden legs. He never shared the table with others. Each time, he ordered chrysanthemum tea but never tasted it.

Although curious about why this customer ordered the same tea yet never took even a single sip, wasting his money, the waitress knew it was none of her business and did not ask.

Maybe his glum face and habitual silence also further prevented her from asking.

Looking out of the window into a cloudless, very blue sky where the sun shone brightly, the man turned his gaze to a building covered with metal sheets in the backyard of the one-story tea house. An elderly white-haired woman in an armchair was basking in the sun near the building door. Periodically her head drooped in an obvious doze, but she would raise it again a bit later. Because of the sun's heat, she tried, with trembling hands, to cover the center of her scalp where there was less hair but couldn't quite extend her hands so far. Surrendering, she clasped her hands, letting them rest in her lap.

An old man holding the knob of a walking cane in his left hand came out of the house, dragging a wooden chair over to the old woman. Next, he walked slowly back into the house. He soon returned with an umbrella under his right arm, cautiously opened it, and held it over the old woman.

After a half-hour, the old man closed the umbrella, placing it on the ground next to his chair. Shade had covered the old woman, who was now deep asleep. Gripping his cane with his left hand and tightly holding his chair's wooden arm with his right, he carefully stood just as a dark cloud covered the sun. He walked into the house and turned to look at the old woman.

Half an hour later, he returned holding a bowl of red rice porridge and a spoon. When the woman didn't respond, he lightly tapped the frame of her chair with his cane, waking her and handed her the bowl. Reaching for it with her trembling right hand, she tried to steady it with her left hand to keep it from spilling, but the bowl still trembled.

The old man sat in his chair against which his cane now rested. He took the bowl from the old woman, held it in his left hand, and picking up the spoon with his

right hand, he scooped up some soup and sipped it. He scooped another full spoon of soup, blew on it, and fed the old woman. He did this until she raised her left hand, gesturing for him to stop. The old man put the bowl on the ground, pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket, and gently wiped her mouth. He then picked up the bowl, ate some spoons of soup, and wiped his mouth with the handkerchief. Holding the bowl in his right hand and the cane in his left, he stood and entered the house.

A few minutes later, he came out with a glass of water and handed it to the old woman. Resting his walking stick against his chair, he slowly bent his skeletal, hunched back, and picked up the umbrella from the ground. Sitting back in his chair, he opened the umbrella and held it over the old woman as she sipped the lukewarm water. Taking a small white towel from her jacket pocket, she wiped the sweat from her forehead and returned the glass to the old man.

The old woman couldn't keep her head steady and dozed off intermittently as they chatted. He giggled, not taking his eyes off her, holding the umbrella over her. When she was awake, they chatted and smiled at each other.

When it was time for his supper, the customer, watching the old man, murmured to himself, "What a great couple!" paid for the untouched tea, and left.

The man sat on a chair in his family's living room. His mother brought plates of pork fried with cabbage, chicken fried with green chili, and tomatoes cooked with eggs. Olive oil and flavor enhancers were used in all the dishes. The mother put the food on the table where her son sat, returned to the kitchen, and brought two bowls of rice and three pairs of chopsticks. She set the bowls on the table, sat next to her son, and asked him to call his father, who was sleeping.

The son guessed his parents had quarreled because his father usually helped his mother prepare meals. He went to his parents' bedroom, where a blanket covered his father, who lay on his back. He called, asking him to come for dinner. His father replied that he would join them soon without raising his head. The son rejoined his mother, and they quietly ate.

The son wanted to ask his mother what had happened but dared not. He knew she was still mad at him because of what had happened recently. She needed more time to forgive him.

A few days earlier, he had divorced his wife after hearing from a friend that she was having an affair with another man. His mother had begged him not to divorce. Her daughter-in-law was sincere and kind to her. Whenever his mother and father had strife - sometimes he beat her - the daughter-in-law would intervene and stop her father-in-law. Her protective, sympathetic behavior touched the mother-in-law. The two were emotionally connected. If he argued with his wife, his mother would support her daughter-in-law and scold her son.

The son had come home around three AM one morning and pushed the bedroom door with his foot. His wife woke up and immediately detected the smell of alcohol filling the bedroom. He was drunk, so she scolded, "Drunk again! What a bad

man!"

He stumbled over, slapped her, and proclaimed, "I'm a man. I do what I want! You don't control me!"

She cried, waking his mother, who slept in the next room. She entered their room and pointed at her son, shouting, "A real man never beats his wife. What's wrong with you?"

Grabbing her son's shoulder, she dragged him into the living room and pushed him down on the sofa. As she rebuked him, he ignored her, falling into a drunken sleep.

Eventually, his father came to join them, bringing a bowl of rice and a pair of chopsticks from the kitchen. He sat by his son and, ignoring the chopsticks on the table before him, began eating with the chopsticks he had brought. The son was between his parents, who neither talked to nor looked at one another. When his mother had finished, she took her bowl and chopsticks into the kitchen and washed the pots and other utensils. A couple of minutes later, the son went to the kitchen and, returning with two glasses half full of hot water, gave one to his father. He resumed his seat, sipped the water, and chatted for a few minutes while waiting for his father to finish eating.

After eating, his father returned to the bedroom while the son cleared the bowls, plates, and chopsticks from the table and handed them to his mother in the kitchen. He knew she was emotionally wounded and wanted to comfort her. Still, he dared not try, thinking it would only worsen things as she was still very upset about his divorce.

Remaining silent, he retired to his bedroom, where he lay on his back on the bed for a while, staring at the ceiling mirror. Convinced he was the most handsome man in his home area, he had purchased three mirrors. He had put two on his bedroom walls and one on the ceiling to admire himself before going to bed and when waking up.

Able, at this moment, to see only half of his face in the mirror, he suddenly wanted to smoke. He stood and gazed in the mirror on one wall, inspecting his prominent, straight nose, double eyelids, distinct chin, broad forehead, and long neck. Turning, he looked in the mirror on the opposite wall and with satisfaction observed his black leather shiny shoes, black fabric pants, black shirt, and black jacket, thinking, "How handsome! What fashionable clothes!" as he rummaged in the drawers of the bedside table for a pack of cigarettes. Although not finding any, he did find a photo of his ex-wife. After looking at it for a while, he put it back in the drawer and firmly pushed it shut.

He sighed, lay back on the bed, closed his eyes, and began remembering.

A year earlier, a friend had invited him and several others to a bar. A beautiful young woman approached, sat by him, and encouraged him to drink. Toward the end of the evening, he was drunk and went with her to a hotel, where she took a selfie with him

as he lay shirtless on the bed.

The next day, one of his wife's friends saw the picture on her phone and informed his wife, who later told him about the photo and asked what had happened the night before. He angrily demanded that she show him the photo, which she couldn't. The husband then scolded, "Don't listen to those spreading rumors. I spent last night at my friend's home!"

His wife didn't argue. She didn't believe him, accepting that he had probably had sex with the young woman, but she forgave him.

He finished remembering this incident, suddenly opened his eyes, and stared at himself in the ceiling mirror. Overcome by guilt, he could not bear to see himself, so he shut his eyes and turned to one side.

29

FICKLE LOVE



mother lived with her son and daughter in a small tent. She had never married, so they didn't know their father and never asked her about him. The boy herded their six sheep while the girl herded three female yaks and two calves. Their mother collected yak dung for fuel near their tent and prepared noodles for their evening meals.

They were not rich, but they cared for each other. They liked the feeling of caring about each other and led a happy life until their mother's death when the boy had just turned ten, and the girl was only nine. Then the boy and girl were less happy. Nevertheless, the children continued to herd their family's livestock, which increased until they were no longer the poorest family in their tribe.

Years passed. The young woman fell in love with a man from a neighboring tribe, but when her lover eventually asked her to marry him, she hesitated.

A few yaks were stolen from their tribe leader during this time. He came to their home and accused her brother of being the thief. He told the young man to confess and compensate.

The young man protested his innocence, but the night the yaks had been stolen, he had passed the leader's home to visit his lover and had been seen. The leader warned the young man, "You have three days to confess. I was told you were riding a yak near my home the night the yaks were stolen. If you don't confess, I'll take you to the local police station."

His sister was sure her brother hadn't stolen the yaks. The day after the leader left her tent, her lover visited. Learning why she was so anxious, he revealed that a thief from his tribe had stolen those yaks and sold them cheaply to his tribe members.

Two days later, she told her brother, "A herd mate told me a thief from our neighbor tribe stole the yaks. You should inform the leader."

Her brother agreed. Later, the tribe leader apologized to the young man declaring him innocent.

After the young woman decided to marry her lover, he regularly visited her at night. She was happy but didn't tell others, keeping the relationship a secret.

When she became pregnant, her lover stopped visiting. Still, she believed that one day he would return, and they would marry.

Some months later, even after giving birth to a daughter, her lover did not return.

She was deeply hurt when her lover eventually visited and told her he was

married. She decided not to tell her daughter who her father was, deciding her lover did not deserve to know his daughter and would never enjoy her love and attention.

She lived with her daughter and unmarried brother and was devoted to them.

Her brother helped a woman who lived with her mother pack their yaks when they moved from their winter pasture to summer pasture and from summer pasture to winter pasture. Later, when he learned the woman had fallen in love with a wealthy man from another tribe, he no longer helped her and her mother.

30

GIRL WITH A TAIL



One windy winter evening, a little girl with curly, tousled hair played with her only playmate, a boy about her age. They picked up white and black stones and arranged them in lines, pretending the stones were their yaks. While they played in the boy's family's yak enclosure, their clothes got dirtier and dirtier as gusts of cold wind swirled dust into the air, darkening the sky. The two children periodically dabbed their eyes with their sleeves until the gusts relented.

The two children were the same age and height, although the boy was chubbier than the girl, who ran much faster than the boy. Once their interest in the stone yaks faded, they moved to a corner of the yak-dung wall enclosure.

Occupying the best, warm place in the corner, the girl started a story she had learned from the boy's grandmother, whom she liked visiting when the boy refused to play or ignored her. She squatted comfortably and began:

Once a mouse family had a nest by a tree near a small lake. The mouse mother led her kids into their neighboring family's yak enclosure near their nest to collect wild baby yams. When the mouse mother found a big white wild yam, she excitedly told her kids that it was auspicious and would bring good fortune, so she wrapped it in a strip of yellow silk she had stolen from the neighboring family.

The boy interrupted, "How did the mouse mother steal the cloth?"

The girl stared at the boy, not knowing the answer and wondering why she hadn't asked the grandmother. So, she replied, "The point is not how she stole the cloth. Just let me finish the story."

When the boy nodded, the girl smiled and continued: The mouse mother put the white yam in a wooden box and locked it with a wooden lock. She put a wooden key on a small wooden table and told her three kids, "Don't eat the yam!"

The boy asked, "Did the little mice eat the yam?"

The girl said, "Be patient! You'll know what happened to the yam when I finish!"

The boy looked at the girl, blinked several times, and said, "Okay. Please continue."

The girl didn't remember exactly where she was in the story, thought for a second, recalled the next part, and continued:

A pika family moved nearby, becoming the mouse family's neighbor. The pika mother was lazy

and didn't collect wild baby yams, so she ordered her kids to go with the mouse family and collect wild baby yams. Her kids had poor collection skills, so they didn't have many.

One day, the pika mother visited the mouse family when the mouse mother was absent. The pika mother asked the little mice, "May I take your family's big, white yam? We invited some monks to chant scriptures to bring good fortune to our family. I want to offer them the white yam."

The little mice replied in unison, "Mother told us not to open the box, so we can't give you the white yam."

Annoyed by their reluctance, the pika mother grabbed the wooden key, opened the box, clutched the white yam, and raced away. When the mouse mother returned home, she found her kids were crying and asked, "What's wrong?"

One little mouse sobbed, "The mother pika stole our family's white yam."

After glancing into the open wooden box, the mouse mother rushed outside and spied the pika mother hurrying home. The mouse mother shouted, "Stop!" but she only ran faster. The mouse mother chased the pika mother and, catching up with her, grabbed her tail in her mouth, bit down hard, cutting off her tail.

In great pain, the pika mother stopped. The mouse mother jerked the white yam from the pika mother and returned home. That's why pikas have no tails.

The boy laughed so hard he rolled on the ground as warm tears trickled down his plump cheeks. Suddenly he stopped laughing, stared at the girl, and asked, "Do you believe some people have tails?"

"Impossible!"

"Do you have a tail?"

The girl was startled, "What?"

"I said, 'Do you have a tail?'"

The girl responded, "Well, do you have a tail?"

"We're different. I don't have a tail, but maybe you do."

"We're the same. You're a person, and I'm a person. I also don't have a tail."

"I told you we're different. Grandfather told me that if siblings sleep together and have children, the children will have tails."

"People don't have tails. For example, have you seen any people with tails?"

"No."

"Are you sure if siblings sleep together and have children, they'll have tails?"

"Yes, because that's what Grandfather said. You must have a tail. I want to see it."

"What?"

"You are your mother and your mother's brother's daughter, so you must have a tail."

"My uncle is not my father."

"Your father is your uncle!" the boy insisted, pushing the girl over and rushing home.

The girl cried in the corner for a few minutes and then ran outside.

■ ■ ■

Fifteen years later, the little girl who had played in the yak enclosure had become a beautiful woman and married her childhood playmate, the boy. When she mentioned their childhood, they recounted stories from that time. Teasingly, the beautiful woman asked, "Do you think I have a tail?"

At first, her husband felt guilty for bullying her when they were children, but then he smiled and teased, "Probably you do!"

They both laughed.

31

GOLDEN TOWN RESTAURANT



A herdsman wearing a gray, modern fabric robe stood at the entrance of Golden Town Restaurant, the most popular eatery in the local town. She started to enter but withdrew, seemingly overwhelmed by the many people inside. She walked a little way from the entrance of the one-story restaurant with four windows. Glancing through a window, she saw four men sitting at a table playing chess on a thin square board etched with lines where chess pieces sat. When a chess player noticed her, she quickly averted her gaze and shyly inspected the shiny black leather shoes her husband had purchased for her. They were her favorite shoes, only worn when she went to town or participated in religious rites.

Taking her cellphone from her robe pouch, she started to dial her old friends who were scheduled to be inside the restaurant, waiting for her. Then she stopped, deciding it was unnecessary to ask her friends to come outside, find her, and escort her inside. Instead, she peered into the restaurant through the slightly ajar door. Customers were in groups at tables, chatting and laughing loudly. One man was so overcome by laughter that he plopped on the floor, bringing more laughter. Worried that she would attract attention if she entered, she stepped back and stood quietly, thinking about what to do next.

She hadn't met her friends in years. She had been twenty-one when she finished nine years of compulsory education. Her parents had suggested she return home and marry. She had agreed, thinking she was too old to continue schooling. Some of her classmates were years younger. Two continued their education. One studied for three years at a medical-vocational school in the local prefecture town and worked as a doctor in the local town clinic. The other friend majored in Tibetan literature, graduated from a provincial college, and taught Tibetan to grades three and four in a local primary school.

The herdsman anxiously considered what she would talk about with her friends. "I'm a stupid herdsman. I've forgotten what I learned in school," she worried.

She cared for her children and her husband's parents, who were in their sixties. She herded her family's yaks, milked yaks every morning, made butter and yogurt, dried cheese, cooked meals, and washed her family's clothes. This left no time to read. She imagined she could only talk to her friends about her herding life and

assumed they would not be interested. The thought of meeting her well-educated friends and sharing a meal made her so uncomfortable that she wondered if she should go home.

She walked a few steps from the restaurant and paused. "It's unfair to leave since I promised to meet them after they invited me for a meal through WeChat. They respect me, even though I'm a herdsman," she concluded.

Now emboldened, she strode inside the large main room of the restaurant, where the many tables were all occupied. In the center of the room, four young men sat around a big metal stove. Two rested their shoes on the lower stove trim. Two big aluminum kettles sang on the stove. A big covered aluminum pot also sat atop the stove. A plate full of steamed stuffed dumplings had been placed on the pot. The young men chatted as they ate the dumplings.

The herdsman anxiously looked around the room, trying to locate her friends. She noticed a young man sitting in a corner with friends, looking at her. She shyly dodged his gaze, lowered her head, and became conscious of sweat trickling down her forehead as the stove's belly glowed red. She realized many people were inside the restaurant because it was warm while cold winter was outside. "Don't be nervous," she counseled herself, thinking her anxiety had made her sweat.

An old man sitting near the stove said, "What's that smell? Is something burning?"

One of the boys sitting near the stove jerked his smoking shoe from the lower trim, stuck out his tongue, and looked at his friend sitting next to him. Both laughed.

Concluding her friends were not there, she moved toward the door but stopped when her phone buzzed. She answered, turned, and walked to a room next to the kitchen at one corner of the restaurant. She entered the small private room that featured a small window. It was bright inside. Three wooden benches were positioned around a square wooden table. The doctor sat next to the window, and the teacher sat opposite. They were facing each other. They stood and greeted the herdsman. The doctor clutched the herdsman's hand, "It's so good to meet you after many years! How are you?"

"I'm good! How are you?"

"I'm good. Please sit," said the doctor, pointing to the unoccupied bench.

The teacher asked, "How are you, Sister? I'm so glad you came!"

The herdsman replied, "I'm good and happy to meet you too," as she settled on the bench. Looking at the doctor, she exclaimed, "You've changed! You were slender when you were a student. You've gained weight."

The doctor agreed, "That's right! I've gained a lot of weight. It's not good."

The herdsman wanted to say something, but the teacher interrupted, "You, on the other hand, have lost weight. You were plump when you were a student!"

"You're so lucky to have lost weight!" agreed the doctor.

"I'm not lucky. You are the lucky one! Gaining weight means you enjoy life, don't have to work too hard, and can rest a lot. I'm busy herding yaks and doing

family chores. I have little time to rest."

"Gaining weight makes you unattractive - the slenderer, the more beautiful. Look at my fat body - ugly!" declared the doctor.

The teacher looked at the doctor's double-lidded large eyes and high straight nose and said, "You're not too fat. Don't worry! You're still a beauty!"

"Exactly! Look at me; I'm thin as a beggar!" exclaimed the herds woman.

"Not at all," responded the doctor, "You are slender and tall with a nice featured body. Everybody admires your attractive body when you wear a good modern robe."

The herds woman gazed at her friends. The doctor wore a white shirt under a white jacket, jeans, and black high-heeled shoes. The teacher wore a red shirt, a black down-stuffed coat, sports pants, and white sports shoes. She thought, "My friends are so lucky to be able to dress this way. Their lives are far better than mine!"

A waitress opened the door, placed a small kettle of milk tea, three porcelain bowls, and two plates of dumplings on the table, and apologized, "Sorry! Too many customers! I forgot to offer tea first."

It's okay," the doctor replied.

The teacher agreed, "Don't worry. We had a great conversation. I forgot I had ordered a kettle of tea."

The waitress poured tea into their bowls, smiled, wished them a good meal, and closed the door behind her.

Placing a plate of dumplings in front of the herds woman, the doctor said, "Please have as many as you like. We can order more!"

The herds woman pushed the plate of dumplings toward her two friends, saying, "Let's put this in the middle of the table. I can reach it."

The teacher moved the plate of dumplings back in front of the herds woman, "It's okay, Sister. We'll share this other plate of dumplings. Our old sow won't eat many dumplings."

They laughed and began eating. The herds woman was uncomfortable with a whole plate of dumplings before her while her friends shared one plate, so she scooted the plate to the middle of the table. She ate a few dumplings and sipped milk tea from her bowl. The doctor handed a dumpling to the herds woman and urged, "Don't be shy. We're old friends."

The herds woman looked at the doctor's white hands and then at her cracked fingernails and rough hands, again thinking her life was inferior. She gazed at her friends' pale clean faces and thought, "Their lives are far better than mine."

The herds woman accepted the dumpling from the doctor and explained, "I'm not shy - just nearly full."

"You treat our sister like a kid," admonished the teacher.

The doctor laughed and asked the herds woman, "How many children do you have?"

"I have two sons and a daughter."

"You're so lucky. I also want to have two sons and one daughter," said the teacher.

The doctor agreed, "Yes! You are fortunate to have children."

Turning to the doctor, the herdswoman asked, "I heard you married. Who did you marry?"

"My husband is from a neighboring town and works for the local government."

"That's good. How many children do you have?" continued the herdswoman.

The doctor sipped milk tea from her bowl before replying, "We have no children. My husband and I went to provincial hospitals several times."

"What did the doctors say?" inquired the teacher.

"They gave me some medicine and said it would help me become pregnant."

"It didn't work?" asked the herdswoman in concern.

The doctor sadly continued, "No. I want children, but I can't seem to get pregnant. I'm sure I made mistakes in my previous life, and now I'm being punished."

"It's enough that your husband is kind to you. You don't have to have children," consoled the teacher.

"You have little freedom, and there's a lot of pressure taking care of children. Having children is a source of suffering, especially if they disobey you as they grow older," reflected the herdswoman.

The doctor found no solace in this and continued, "You don't understand the feelings of a couple who yearn to have children but can't. Once a father brought his three-year-old son with a fever to the clinic where I work. I examined him. It was not very serious. I gave the father some medicine and explained how to give it to his son. I then gave some candies to the boy, who accepted them and murmured 'Mum'. I can't explain how I felt. I'm not sure if I was happy or sad. Anyway, I felt something different. It was the first time, ever, someone had called me 'mum', which intensified my desire to have children."

Reading the doctor's sad face, the teacher consoled, "Don't be sad. You have parents, siblings, and a considerate husband. How lucky you are!"

"You're right!" exclaimed the doctor and refilled their bowls with milk tea.

Let's not talk about sad things. We should be happy today! That's why we're here."

The herdswoman agreed. "True. We can't often meet and enjoy meals now that we are married."

The teacher readjusted her seat on the bench and confessed, "I'm unmarried."

"Really? I thought you were married," said the herdswoman in surprise.

"I had decided to marry my boyfriend. We had spent five years together and loved each other. But then, one day, he told me he needed to visit his parents in another county in our prefecture. Since that day, I have been unable to contact him. He blocked my phone number and WeChat. I called him using my colleagues' phones,

but he knew their numbers because he had worked as a Chinese language teacher at the primary school for several years, so he didn't answer.

"A month later, a friend from his home place posted a short video on her WeChat of moments from his wedding. I couldn't believe it! He had promised to marry me, and I had promised the same."

"Don't be too sad. You're a good woman and teacher. It's easy for you to marry a good man," the herds woman reassured.

The doctor agreed. "Yes! We can't change the past. Leave it alone. That's the best way to face unhappy memories."

The teacher looked at the herds woman, "You're so lucky to have a good husband."

"My husband is very kind to me. He has never beaten me and helps herd yaks when I'm very busy with house chores. He also agrees when I want to visit my parents and siblings."

The doctor looked at the teacher, "No reason to make yourself unhappy. You're beautiful, kind, and have a steady job. You can marry anytime you want."

"It's easy to marry but hard to marry the right person. I'm afraid to marry after my former boyfriend betrayed me. I thought he was the right man, but the reality was different. My parents urge me to marry. I don't know what to do," the teacher elaborated.

The herds woman comforted, "Marriage is a source of hatred and quarrels. You can have a happy unmarried life with a stable job. You don't need to worry about living expenses and can do practically anything. No need for you to live under someone's control."

Curious, the doctor asked, "Does your husband control you?"

"No, he's kind to me, but he listens to his mother. Once when he herded our family's yak, he asked me to wash the children's robes. I started at noon with my neighbor family's daughter. We washed clothes together on a creek bank and also washed our hair. It was four PM when I returned home. My mother-in-law scolded, "What took you so long?" recounted the herds woman.

"That night, my husband chastised me, 'Next time, don't waste time gossiping with the neighbor's daughter,' so I knew my mother-in-law had reported to my husband."

"Your husband shouldn't scold you. You work for your family. There's also nothing wrong with chatting with your neighbor," said the doctor.

"It's okay that he scolds me sometimes, but it's really painful when he doesn't trust me and believes what his mother tells him."

The teacher agreed sympathetically.

The doctor smiled and announced, "Let's be happy today!"

While they continued to sip milk tea, munch on dumplings, and chat, the herds woman got a call and answered, "Hey!"

A man said, "Let's go. Where are you?"

"I'm in the Golden Town Restaurant with my friends," reported the herdsman.

"Okay. I'll be there in a few minutes," the man said and hung up.

The herdsman explained, "I have to go. I came here this morning in my neighbor's car. He phoned to say he'll be here soon. I'll ride back home in his car."

At this, the doctor exclaimed, "What a great time we've had! I'm so glad you joined us. Let's meet again soon when you are free."

The herdsman said, "Of course."

The teacher added, "I'm thrilled to sit with you two and chat! We shared some unpleasant things, and I'm so glad to have friends to share sadness with. I hope we can meet again."

They walked out of the private room into the main room, with customers still talking loudly and playing chess. Some boys were playing games on their cell phones in a corner. The herdsman walked to the restaurant manager, who was pouring water from a big orange plastic water container into the big pot on the stove. She took some folded cash from her robe pouch and asked the owner, "How much?"

The owner said, "Your friends paid when they ordered."

The herdsman stuffed the money back into her robe pouch and followed her friends outside. "It's already sunset. Time passed so fast today," she said.

The doctor and the teacher chimed, "Right," in unison.

A car parked near them. The herdsman walked over, opened the door next to the driver, and said goodbye.

Her friends said the same as she got inside the car and shut the door. As the car moved away, she looked into the rearview mirror and saw the back of her friends as they walked away. She recalled her friends saying, you're lucky to have children, a good husband..."

She thought, "Maybe they're right. I am indeed a lucky herdsman!"

32

HER

Badtso's peers, all teenagers intoxicated with romantic ideas, are in a frenzy to marry, though they are too young to understand the realities of marriage. Parents are proud of their children's marriages - proud that they've done their duty to ensure their children are paired with spouses.

...

Badtso divorced thirty days after her marriage to Dele, though it was not her decision. She was a young woman married into Dele's home with no say in the matter.

One ordinary day, thirty days after she married, Badtso had, as usual, washed Dele's clothes and hung them over the red-brick courtyard wall to dry. Dele returned home from the local town, where he had purchased food, a kettle, a pot, and a spoon. As he sipped tea, he unexpectedly declared, "Go home. I don't want to live with you."

Assuming he was kidding, Badtso smiled, handed him a plate of boiled meat, and said, "Don't tease! Eat some of this. I'm sure you're hungry."

Dele squinted at her as he took the plate and demanded with irritation, "Go home!"

She glanced at his scowling, dark face. His bulging eyes seemed about to pop out of their sockets. Suddenly realizing he wasn't joking, she responded, "I'm not going anywhere. This is my home. I don't have another home."

He shoved away the plate which struck his bowl, turning it over, splashing tea on the floor before it also fell onto the floor, scattering pieces of meat. Clutching his phone, he muttered, "Okay. I'll call your father and ask him to take you home," and dialed Badtso's Father.

...

Badtso's mother and aunt sat on a high mountain as their yaks grazed nearby. Badtso's mother pushed a strand of hair away from her eyes and reflected, "It's not easy for a divorced woman to remarry."

The aunt, who had divorced and was the mother of one child, a daughter, had never remarried. She nodded and brooded for a second before adding, "I hope they don't divorce. Living with a man makes a woman's life easier in a male-dominated society like ours."

"A woman should live alone rather than with a bad husband, who is another burden for her. That kind of man only knows how to spend her money and enjoy himself. He's not concerned about his wife and family," replied Badtso's mother.

But the aunt's experience suggested otherwise. "No matter how bad the husband is, it's better to live with him than live alone. You don't appreciate how difficult it is for a woman to live alone because you have a husband."

...

Dele and his uncle sat by Dele's family's yak enclosure. The uncle glared at Dele, "What's wrong with you? It's not possible to marry for a few days and then divorce. Are you crazy? You're making trouble for your parents and me. Why didn't you think carefully before you decided to marry?"

Dele looked at his uncle's face and knew he was mad, so he only shook his head slightly, knowing it was better to remain silent.

The uncle stood and looked down at Dele, who remained sitting cross-legged on the ground. As he walked toward Dele's home, the uncle stopped, turned back, and cautioned, "Don't think too much. Have a good life with Badtso."

Dele stood, declaring loudly, "I don't want to live with her. You live with her if you don't want her to return to her parents' home. My friends told me I should marry a woman who had never married. You knew Badtso had divorced once, and my friends have nothing good to say about her. All my friends are married to women who have never married before."

"Don't care whether she was married before or not. What's important is she's kind to you and your parents. She's a good woman. Don't divorce her," counseled the uncle.

Dele said nothing.

The uncle was tall and stout. As he walked slowly toward Dele, his face turned red, and he clenched his right hand into a fist, throwing a punch that Dele dodged.

As Dele walked away towards his family's house yard, the uncle shook his head and exclaimed, "What a silly man!"

In Dele's family's living room, Badtso's father sat next to Dele's father, sipping tea and munching on fried bread. Badtso sat next to her mother-in-law across from the men. Her head was bowed. Her mother-in-law whispered, "Don't worry. I'll talk to my son and persuade him not to divorce."

Badtso nodded.

...

Dele's uncle and Badtso's father now sat in a corner of Dele's family house yard, leaning against the wall. Each moved the upper part of their robes to protect their heads as the wind swirled dust into the air. When the wind stopped, Badtso's father wiped the dust from his eyes, lit a pipe, puffed several times, and blew tobacco ash from the pipe bowl. He handed the pipe, tobacco bag, and a small box of matches to Dele's uncle, who packed tobacco into the pipe, lit it, and puffed.

Badtso's father began, "I told Dele at the very beginning, 'My daughter's not like other women. She has married and divorced. She's not fit for you.' But your nephew said he had to marry her. Now, he wants to divorce her. I don't understand! It's bad for everybody if they divorce."

Puffing away, the uncle replied, "Yeah, you're right. I tried my best, urging him not to divorce, but he won't listen."

Dele and his mother squatted next to the house door. Looking deeply into Dele's eyes, his mother said, "Badtso is so pitiful! She married into our home, far from her family. Please don't hurt her by divorcing. She's a good woman. You'll not meet another like her."

Dele looked at his mother, "I don't want to live with her."

His mother sadly gazed at him, "Please, don't divorce..."

Cutting her off, Dele stood and walked into his family's house before his mother could finish.

Badtso packed her clothes and toiletries into bags and walked outside. As her mother-in-law followed her, she held her right arm and said, "You know I have no authority. I would not let him divorce you if I did."

Badtso glanced at her mother-in-law's tear-filled eyes, which made her almost cry. She then shifted her gaze to her father, standing beside his car with her father-in-law and uncle near Dele's family's yard. As she moved toward her father, her mother-in-law reluctantly let her go, saying, "I'm so sorry," and rushed back into the house, wiping her tears with her hands.

Badtso handed her bags to her father, who packed them into the car's trunk.

Dele stood near his family's house door and watched the car drive away.

A month passed.

Badtso's mother cleaned bowls, a pot, and cups in the family's small kitchen and entered the living room. She offered a glass of tea to her husband, puffing a cigarette in an armchair near the living room window. He took the cup from her, had a sip, and placed the cup on a nearby table. Badtso's mother sat in another armchair, sipped tea from his cup, and said, "We should encourage Badtso to marry."

Adjusting his position in the chair, he casually replied, "Why are you so worried about her marriage? Don't worry. She's young and will marry soon."

Badtso's mother looked at him, "Did you ever think about what others are saying about our daughter? She's now divorced twice. I heard others sharing rumors about her, gossiping that she had been chased away by her two husbands. Others think she's just used goods."

"Don't pay attention to others' judgments. It will ruin your good mood. Ignore what they say."

"I can't do that."

"A few days ago, my sworn brother said he hoped our daughter would marry his son."

"Your sworn brother is a good man. His son isn't good-looking, but I've heard he is a good person. It would be our daughter's good fortune to marry him."

"Be patient. Don't urge her to marry again; otherwise, she may marry the wrong man. Our family's reputation would be even more damaged if she married and divorced again, for the third time. Then nobody will ever want to marry her."

A few days later, Badtso chatted with her friends on WeChat as her mother fried bread. Badtso's mother wiped her eyes as smoke and the odor of frying bread filled the house. Badtso sent a voice message to her friend, "I'm back home."

Using a stick with a sharp end, Badtso's mother stabbed a piece of bread floating on the surface of the boiling oil in a black cast-iron pot on a metal stove and put it into a basin.

She looked at Badtso, "It's shameful to tell others that you are divorced and have come back home."

Badtso looked at her mother and wanted to say something, but nothing came. She knew that anything but agreement would annoy her mother. Instead, she flung her phone on a small table and walked outside, slamming the door behind her.

Badtso went to visit her neighbor, her aunt, who lived nearby.

Badtso's aunt offered a bowl of tea as they sat and asked, "Why did you divorce?"

As Badtso sipped the tea, she replied, "He didn't want to live with me any longer and told me to go home."

"Why did he ask you to go home?"

"I discovered he was chatting with a woman on WeChat. He said she was his ex-girlfriend. We quarreled about that."

"What a weird man."

"I later noticed his ex-girlfriend's photos on his phone. He was mad at me when I asked about the girl. That's why he divorced me."

"Did he mistreat you?"

"No, he never beat me. In fact, we rarely spent time together. We shared the same bed for the first five nights of our marriage. After that, he went to play mahjong in his uncle's home with his brother for the other nights we lived together. He would return home early in the morning and herd the family's yaks. We were married for only a month and slept together for only five nights. How ridiculous! Married for a month!"

"His parents didn't scold him for playing mahjong every night?"

"His parents didn't know about it. His family has two houses. Dele and I slept in one house, and his parents slept in the other."

"Are you sure he left to play mahjong every night?"

"I don't know. Maybe he did something else."

"Do you regret your marriage?"

"I have nothing to regret. I never betrayed him. I did nothing to damage his reputation. He seemed unable to forget his ex-girlfriend. He loved her more than he loved me. Was she his ex-girlfriend or his current lover?"

"Are you sad about separating?"

"Not really."

"Sounds like you didn't love him much."

"I loved him deeply. My parents urged me not to marry him, but I didn't listen. How could I have disobeyed my parents and married him if I didn't love him?"

"Why were you in love with him?"

"We had been chatting for a year before deciding to marry. He promised he'd never leave me once we married. He said he couldn't live without me and would be as kind to me as he was to his parents."

"Men's words are unreliable."

"True. One rainy night, he drove a motorcycle from his home to visit me. His clothes were drenched and dripping. He shivered uncontrollably, which touched me."

The aunt refilled Badtso's bowl, poured tea into hers, and asked, "Will you marry again?"

"I'm now a bad, twice-divorced woman. Nobody will marry me. My life will be finished if I marry another man like Dele."

"Don't worry. You're a young, beautiful woman. Men won't care about your history once your beauty smites them. All men are not bad like Dele. Don't be afraid to marry again. You'll meet a good man."

"My life will be miserable if I marry another man like Dele. I prefer to remain unmarried than live with an unreliable man."

"It's good for you to be married. It's hard for a woman to live in a male-dominated society without a man. I'm a single mother of one child. Others don't repay the money they borrow from me. They know I can't do anything to them, so they take advantage of me and don't repay."

"You shouldn't loan money to them."

"They begged me, and I felt sympathetic. Women are emotionally weak and need a man to be with when they get old. Men help do things women can't, so women can feel less pressure from life."

"Right, but I'm sure Dele will remarry."


"You are still thinking about Dele. Delete him from your mind."

"I don't care about him since he kicked me out, but I worry about the next woman he marries. He'll do to her what he did to me. She'll be miserable."

Her aunt silently looked at Badtso's round beautiful eyes, high straight nose, plump face, and red cheeks. She thought, "What a lovely woman!" and hoped she'd have a happy third marriage.

33

IS AGE JUST A NUMBER?

somo and Lhamo were born in the same community, in the same year, and on the same day. They were neighbors, their fathers were brothers, and they believed they had the same destiny. As other local older women, they had herded their family's yaks since they turned seven. Their fates diverged when they turned eight.

Lhamo's father, Pujup, was fond of his niece, Tsomo, and was glad that Tsomo and Lhamo herded together and were on intimate terms. Each time Lhamo wanted to spend the night in Tsomo's tent, Tsomo talked to Pujup on behalf of Lhamo. Pujup never refused his niece's request, knowing Lhamo would get up early the following day and return home in time to help her mother and her older sister collect yak dung and milk their yaks.

Tsomo's family had no TV or radio, so Lhamo sometimes stayed at Tsomo's home at night. Tsomo and Lhamo sang herding songs for evening entertainment and asked Tsomo's parents to judge who was the better singer. They sang the same songs they had learned from Tsomo's mother, Gonkyi, a locally well-known singer. Choosing who sang better was difficult because their voices were similar, and they sang the same songs. The girls were disappointed when there was no winner and no loser, so Tsomo's parents announced Lhamo was the best singer to make Lhamo, the guest, happy.

The two girls started to wrestle one night, but Tsomo's father, Trinbo, thought it was dangerous, so they agreed to stop. Continuing the contest between the girls, Tsomo brought a leather bag half full of barley flour from the lower part of the family's tent and challenged the girls to lift it. The bag was heavy. Tsomo could lift it only to the level of her lap and walk a few steps. When it was Lhamo's turn, the bag fell with a thump to the ground when she tried to raise it. Flour shot out through the top of the bag, loosely tied with a leather cord, turning her hair and face white. Tsomo and her parents laughed uproariously as Lhamo smiled and accepted she was the loser.

Lhamo's favorite food was noodles cooked with beef, so Tsomo asked her mother to prepare this dish whenever Lhamo visited. Tsomo helped by preparing dough in a plastic basin while her mother cut meat into pieces on a small wooden board. Lhamo helped by adding fuel to the adobe stove as Tsomo and her mother prepared the noodles. Thirty minutes later, they had noodles for supper.

They went to bed after supper. Tsomo and Lhamo lay together on the left side

of the tent and entertained each other by telling folktales and riddles for hours before sleeping.

When they turned eight years old, Tsomo was chosen by a community lottery to attend school. She was her family's oldest child and had a younger brother, so her parents did not want to send her to school. Her father visited his brother, Lhamo's father, and explained that Tsomo had to herd his family's yaks and help care for her brother. The local government would fine him if he didn't send Tsomo to school, but local government clerks had told Trinbo that another child could represent Tsomo. He asked his brother to send Lhamo on behalf of Tsomo. Pujup decided his older daughter could herd his family's yaks and agreed.

On a sunny morning, Lhamo and her father rode horses in the direction of the local township town. Tsomo held a slingshot in her right hand and watched Lhamo and her father until they vanished.

Tsomo tried to imagine when she would start a new life journey.

...

One summer day, Tsomo got up at around six when her mother, Gonkyi, called her. After rousing Tsomo, Gonkyi, already dressed, picked up her wooden milk bucket and walked out of the tent.

Tsomo rubbed her eyes, wanting to sleep more, but she knew neighbor women would label her lazy, so she stood, put on her robe, washed her hands in a basin, reached for her small wooden pail, and trudged to her family's yak enclosure near her family's tent.

She couldn't see very well in the thick morning darkness as she untethered a calf and hobbled the calf's mother's front legs with a yak-hair rope even though the mother yak was gentle. Tsomo preferred to milk gentle yaks after a yak kicked over a full wooden bucket, splashing white milk all over the muddy ground. She had sobbed for a half-an-hour and was upset all that day.

After milking twenty yaks, she began collecting fresh yak dung with her right hand and tossed it into the willow basket on her back that her mother had made. Each time the basket was full, she walked near her family's tent, dumped the dung, and spread it on the ground to dry for fuel.

Once her mother had finished milking fifty yaks, she helped her untie the milking yaks, calves, and other yaks. Her father rode a horse and drove the yaks to the nearby mountains.

Tsomo rushed to a creek near her family's tent to wash her hands, plump face, and clean the dung from her fabric shoes. She headed to her family's tent, cleaned and dried her face with a light-blue cotton towel, and then rubbed lotion onto her face. She gazed into a small broken mirror while combing her shiny black hair with a red plastic comb.

Before Trinbo had taken the yaks to the mountains, he had made a fire in the adobe stove, so tea was soon boiling. Tsomo removed the tea kettle from the stove, placing it on the side of the stove. Then, after filling a big pot about three-quarters

full with fresh milk, she heaved it onto the stove. She readied a milk separator, and once the milk had warmed, lifted the pot from the stove, setting it next to the milk separator. She poured two scoops of warm milk and one-and-a-half of cold milk from her mother's wooden bucket into the separator's milk container. She turned the handle of a milk separator until her mother replaced her and asked her to have breakfast.

Gonkyi woke her brother, Belzang, wrapped in a blanket and sleeping on one side of the tent. He stretched, yawned, and rushed out of the tent to pee. Returning, he announced, "Father is back."

Gonkyi told Tsomo to eat the noodles she had just prepared while operating the milk separator. After enthusiastically eating two bowls of noodles, Tsomo mounted the black horse Trinbo had tied near the family's tent and rode to where the yaks were grazing.

It was hot. Flies bit the yaks, which caused some to run from the herd. Tsomo urged her horse to trot faster and attempted to drive them back to the herd. Sweat dripped from her horse's belly, and foam gathered in the leg joints. Sympathizing with the horse, she dismounted, tied it to a bunch of shrubs, and ran on foot after the yaks. Now sweat trickled down her forehead and dripped from her chin, and her shirt stuck uncomfortably to her back. She panted, tasting something metallic in her mouth but eventually got the yaks back together and drove them to the family's yak enclosure and helped her mother tether them at sunset.

Trinbo liked beef with noodles, so Tsomo helped her mother prepare them for supper. Tired and hungry, she devoured three bowls of noodles and went straight to bed without chatting. She knew she had to get up early the following day.

Tsomo's father, Trinbo, often visited the tents of his neighbors, relatives, and friends and generally roamed about in the township town. He was talkative and boastful, so people considered him entertaining and enjoyed chatting with him. He often bragged about how he successfully pursued girls and how hard it was for girls to break up with him once they had sex with him.

Twenty days earlier, Trinbo had returned on the back of Sodrak's motorcycle. Gonkyi was happy her husband had returned and greeted the pair warmly. When they entered the tent, Belzang grabbed the hem of his mother's robe, not daring to look at his father.

While the two men sat together, Trinbo pulled a plastic motorcycle toy from his robe pouch and showed it to his son, who buried his face in the back of his mother's robe, refusing to look at his father until he ordered him to come near. Afraid, Belzang put his head down and reluctantly walked to Trinbo, who handed him the toy, stroked his head, and kissed his forehead. Belzang held the toy in both hands but kept his head down, making Trinbo uncomfortable, so he told his son to go outside and play with the toy.

Gonkyi handed a bowl of milk tea to her husband, who passed it to Sodrak

and told his wife to boil meat or prepare dumplings. Gonkyi put pieces of meat on bones into a pot with water and salt. Knowing Trinbo did not like meat that had boiled too long, she removed the pot from the stove after thirty minutes, put the steaming pieces of meat into a plastic basin, and handed it to her husband with a small knife. The men chatted while eating the meat.

Gonkyi called Belzang and gave him bits of meat she had cut into small pieces. Belzang protested, "Let me use the knife!"

"No. You'll cut yourself!" Gonkyi cautioned.

Ignoring this, Belzang picked up the knife and cut his left thumb, which began bleeding. Belzang began sobbing but stopped after Gonkyi wrapped the wound with a cloth and consoled, "Don't worry! You won't die from this little cut!"

After Tsomo had driven the family's yaks back home from the mountains, her mother came out to help tether the yaks. In the meantime, Trinbo and his friend enjoyed eating the meat and chatting while Belzang played near his family's tent with his new toy and sometimes tried to get on Sodrak's motorcycle. When Trinbo came out to pee, he told his son to stay away from the motorcycle, which sent Belzang running to his mother in the yak enclosure.

The next day, Trinbo gave Sodrak three yaks in return for the motorcycle. Sodrak drove the yaks to his tent, only a few hundred meters from Trinbo's tent.

Trinbo couldn't operate the motorcycle very well. A friend had given him motorcycle lessons two years earlier, but he hadn't driven a motorcycle for over a year. He slowly drove the motorcycle back and forth near the yak enclosure, where the ground was flat, dragging his feet on the ground while his son ran behind. After practicing for an hour, Trinbo fell off the motorcycle, breaking the motorcycle's front light cover and the right-hand mirror. He flew into a rage, stopped practicing, and drove the motorcycle home.

As he entered the tent, his wife was washing the family's clothes by the river. Trinbo was hungry and told Belzang to call his mother and ask her to prepare lunch.

A few minutes later, Gonkyi arrived carrying a big metal basin full of washed clothes. She placed this near the tent, squeezed more water from the clothes, and noticed the broken motorcycle parts while scattering the clothes to dry on the grass near the tent.

As soon as Gonkyi entered the tent, Trinbo scolded her for not having lunch ready on time. Realizing he was annoyed by the broken motorcycle parts, she didn't reply and prepared a lunch of leftover rice noodles and beef.

For two days, Trinbo practiced operating the motorcycle without dragging his feet. Proud of this accomplishment, he rode the motorcycle to a neighbor's tent, where the family head complimented him for having acquired a motorcycle and now being able to operate it. Trinbo happily boasted how he had learned to drive the motorcycle in a very short time.

A few days later, Trinbo mounted the motorcycle and roared off as his wife watched, wondering when she would see him again.

When Belzang turned eight, his mother wanted to send him to the local monastery to be a monk. Trinbo vetoed this, wanting his son to attend the local boarding school and eventually be employed as a government clerk.

Belzang often played with a neighbor's children - Drashi, Gangdron, and Tsoyag. Gangdron was prettier than Tsoyag, so Belzang and Drashi wanted to be her partner when they played in pairs. When Belzang suggested his playmates play hide and seek, they often agreed and divided into pairs. Belzang preferred pairing with Gangdron, who was also a year younger than him. Drashi thought it was unfair Belzang often chose Gangdron to be his partner, leaving Tsoyag to be his partner, but he didn't complain because Belzang was stronger than he was.

When it was their turn to hide, Belzang and Gangdron silently hid behind Gangdron's family's yak enclosure and waited for the other pair to seek them. Staring at Gangdron's big eyes with double eyelids, Belzang thought, "What a pretty girl!" and wanted to give her some of the candy in his pants pocket. As Belzang put his hand into his pocket to get the candy, Drashi tapped his shoulder. Angry that he had been interrupted and hadn't yet given Gangdron the candy, Belzang wanted to hit Drashi. Belzang didn't want Drashi to see him give candy to Gangdron, which showed he liked her, so he left the candy in his pocket and glared at Drashi. Understanding this, Drashi ran away as Belzang chased him.

A sunny afternoon a few days later, Belzang rolled up his pant legs, stood in the shallow river, and washed his head and hair as his mother knelt on the riverbank beside him and washed her long hair in a plastic basin. Belzang squatted by his mother once he finished washing his hair, took his mother's towel from a blue plastic bag and swabbed his scalp and short hair until they were dry. After he returned the towel to his mother, she dried and combed her hair and, while doing this, explained how important it was to be a monk.

"Being a monk is helping others and not harming anyone. This leads to a happy life. On the other hand, secular life is a source of suffering, and marriage can lead to hatred."

Belzang believed whatever his mother told him.

Later, Belzang told his father he wanted to enroll in a local monastery school and become a monk as his mother wished. Trinbo thought a government clerk offered a brighter future than being a monk, so he sent his son to the local primary school, though Gonkyi opposed this.

When it was time for new students to go to school, Belzang got on his father's motorcycle dressed in a new fabric robe, pants, and a jacket. He said goodbye to his mother and sister, and then he and his father started for the local town. His mother stood near his family's yak-hair tent with her eyes fixed on her son's yellow school bag till they vanished from sight.

She wished that journey would bring her son a happy life.

Tsomo knelt and washed clothes at the riverbank under a hot sun. When finished, she stood but then fell, her hands furiously clutching and pulling her hair as her face grew pale and bubbles came from her mouth. Her mother ran to her and, sitting, put her daughter's head on her lap, and grasped her hands. She called Trinbo, who rushed over and carried Tsomo on his back into their tent, and onto a mat. A few minutes later, she inexplicably recovered.

The next day, Trinbo escorted her to a local high-ranking lama, a traditional doctor. The lama gave her some traditional medicine and explained how to take it. Tsomo regularly took medicine as prescribed, and her parents thought it was effective since her seizures were now rare.

Somedays later, Tsomo fell in the tent and again tore at her hair. The parents lifted her and placed her gently on a mat. As before, she seemed to return to normal a few minutes later.

After her seizures intensified and became more frequent, Trinbo and a friend who could speak Chinese took her to a provincial hospital. The doctor diagnosed epilepsy and gave several boxes of pills. Her father's friend explained the prescriptions in Tibetan.

Even though Tsomo took these pills as prescribed, she continued to experience periodic seizures. Her father watched over her while her mother herded their family's yaks.

Tsomo's seemingly incurable epilepsy was her parents' most significant concern.

Trinbo asked a neighbor girl to tend their livestock for a day. Once she agreed, Trinbo drove his motorcycle with Gonkyi and Tsomo on the back, adding weight and making it hard for Trinbo to keep the motorcycle steady. After a new fall, Trinbo scolded Gonkyi for being fat and told his passengers not to move. Trinbo then dragged his feet on the ground to avoid accidents.

When they reached the township town, they saw white fabric tents pitched on the green grassland in front of new buildings of a recently established private vocational school. New students recruited by the school milled about, walking between the tents and their dorm in white Tibetan robes, which were school uniforms. Others were clad in dancing costumes. When a young man clad in a particularly nice Tibetan robe entered a tent holding a guitar, Tsomo stared enviously at the students.

The family soon stopped and entered a small popular local restaurant. Sharing a long, narrow table with a family of four, they ordered three large bowls of beef noodles. The owner offered tea in paper cups and told them their food would take time to arrive since five orders were ahead of them.

Trinbo suggested that Gonkyi and Tsomo shop before the food arrived. They agreed and left without sipping tea.

Just after the noodles were served, Trinbo came out of the restaurant and,

standing at the entrance, looked around to see if he could spot his wife and daughter. He looked over at the few shops and restaurants in the small town center and saw Gonkyi and Tsomo emerge from a shop among the people walking on the street. Gonkyi held a red plastic scoop in her right hand while his daughter clutched a plastic bag with three beverage bottles, a few apples, and some candy. He shouted that lunch was ready, so they crossed the dirt road that divided the town and hurried back to the restaurant.

After lunch, they walked together to the tents near the vocational school, where locals had gathered in a big circle. The school leader, a wealthy local man, and township and county leaders sat in armchairs behind adjoining tables in a long row. Bottles of water had been placed in front of them.

A man dressed in a special robe announced a famous singer would perform. Everyone clapped. With long hair hanging down his back and wearing a gray fabric robe and leather boots, the singer sang a herding song that the audience, especially the leaders, enthusiastically applauded. Dancing and singing by students followed.

At the end of the performances, the school head gave a speech detailing the number of students and staff and explaining why he had built the school, "We accept local teenagers who have never been to school or dropped out of school. Students come here to learn to become tailors and enroll in dancing and singing programs."

After the speech, Trinbo and his family returned home. Trinbo was impressed by the school and thought it offered good vocational opportunities for local teenagers. He suggested Tsomo attend to learn to tailor and added, "After she graduates in three years, she can support herself."

Gonkyi worried that no one at the school would care for Tsomo, but Trinbo was persuasive, "Teachers are like parents, and classmates are like siblings."

They then consulted a local lama who designated a day for her to start school.

On the morning of the selected day, Tsomo was gone. She had disappeared. Her parents and neighbors searched everywhere but could not find her.

Anxious, Trinbo and a local man consulted a local diviner about Tsomo's disappearance. The diviner quietly chanted some mantras, blew over a string of sandalwood prayer beads, closed his eyes, touched the prayer beads to his forehead, and divided twenty beads into two sections using his thumbs and index fingers. He interpreted the results, then pronounced, "Don't worry, she's safe!"

They trusted the diviner, so they returned to their homes and hoped she would soon come home.

A couple of months later, Tsomo appeared with a young man, Dondrub, from a neighboring tribe. Tsomo explained he was her lover, and they had decided to marry. He was twenty, two years her senior.

Trinbo and Gonkyi were thrilled she had safely returned and accepted the arrangement. Dondrub didn't talk much for the first two months, staying mostly in the tent or herding the family's yaks. Trinbo offered his motorcycle anytime Dondrub

wanted to visit his parents or go to town, but in the beginning, he rarely left.

At first, Trinbo and Gonkyi thought their daughter had met the right man, but when Dondrub regularly went to town or visited his family and did not return for days, Trinbo became concerned. Initially, he said nothing since Tsomo was pregnant. But when Tsomo had a seizure and Dondrub was absent, Trinbo complained resentfully to Gonkyi.

Not wanting to upset her parents, Tsomo separated from Dondrub though she loved him. Four months after their separation, Tsomo gave birth to a son in a small fabric tent near her family's tent. Her mother, the midwife, wrapped the infant in a soft cloth and breathed a sigh of relief once her grandson cried and Tsomo nursed him.

However, the infant had difficulty nursing, cried at night, and a few days later passed away. After her son's death, Tsomo's illness grew more severe.

...

Belzang and most of his male classmates stopped attending school after nine years of compulsory education, believing a herding life was better than continued study.

When local elders asked Belzang about his life, he explained a herding life was far superior to attending school. He felt free, could go wherever he wanted, and spent most of his time boasting and imagining a bright future with his friends. He was rarely at home and ignored his mother when she scolded him for spending little time at home.

Like his peers and friends, Belzang was convinced marriage was the most romantic way to spend time with a lover. After he fell in love with a girl from his tribe, his friends flattered him and said nice things about the girl. He trusted his friends, decided to marry her, and brought her to his home.

His parents understood and treated her well.

However, after only a month, Belzang told his father he was no longer interested in the girl and asked Trinbo to escort her to her parents' home.

His parents were startled and explained that this was irrational, but nothing altered Belzang's decision. Finally, his father visited the girl's father. After hours of discussion, they agreed Trinbo's family would pay a six-year-old female yak as compensation for damaging the girl's reputation and psychologically and emotionally injuring her.

Trinbo and the girl mounted horses the next day and departed with the yak.

Gonkyi sighed as she watched them depart.

...

After most of Tsomo's peers married, Trinbo and Gonkyi increasingly worried about Tsomo. Local custom dictated daughters should marry and leave their parents' home while a son stayed with the parents.

Trinbo's friend, Sodrak's nephew, Shebo, was single and a friendly, respectful young man. Sodrak suggested Tsomo marry him. Trinbo trusted Sodrak and agreed.

Not wanting to marry a divorced girl, Shebo disagreed with his uncle, who

consulted a monk who picked a dice from a small table, touched it to his forehead, let it fall on the table, and announced, "It's great if they marry."

Eventually, Shebo agreed to the marriage.

On an auspicious day, Shebo and his friend came in a red car to Tsomo's home. Trinbo and Gonkyi greeted them warmly and seated them on the right side of the tent. Tsomo's mother offered tea and hurried to boil meat. Tsomo wore a new robe and was soon ready to leave with them. She didn't know much about Shebo and shyly and quietly sat on the left side of the tent. Nervous and uncomfortable, Shebo suggested they leave, even though the meat had not yet boiled.

Sitting by the driver, Tsomo looked at her parents, standing at the tent entrance. Her eyes filling with tears, Gonkyi hoped her daughter would have a happy life with Shebo.

Shebo's parents were kind to Tsomo. His mother herded yaks and asked Tsomo to do house chores.

Shebo spent so much time at home that his peers called him an old man. He enjoyed being with Tsomo, who appreciated someone loving and caring for her. They eventually decided to establish a new tent since Shebo had a younger brother, Tsegon, who would live with their parents.

Shebo didn't like to spend time with his friends, who didn't understand why he would marry a woman who periodically suffered from seizures and seemed unable to help his parents herd yaks. "She just stays at home, enjoying her life," they gossiped.

Because Shebo's mother often herded the family's yaks while Shebo and Tsomo were at home, the conclusion was that Shebo was an unfilial, selfish son who cared more for his wife than his mother.

Eventually, Shebo's friends persuaded Shebo to leave Tsomo and marry a healthy girl because he was handsome, had a good reputation, and deserved someone better than Tsomo. While Shebo initially resisted this pressure from his friends, he divorced Tsomo several months later.

...

After graduating from a local, provincial university at twenty-four, Lhamo returned to teach Chinese and math to grades three and four in a boarding school in her home township. She enjoyed her job and was fond of her students, often giving them candy. The students liked her in return.

One Saturday, Lhamo and her boyfriend rode a motorcycle to Tsomo's home, where they found her alone. Her mother was herding the family's yaks, and her father had gone to town. Tsomo greeted them and offered milk tea. Both visitors sat on the right side of the tent. Tsomo felt uncomfortable with Lhamo sitting on the man's side of the tent but said nothing. Tsomo cooked beef with rice noodles, which they ate while chatting.

The two young women went outside after lunch and sat on the grass near the tent. Lhamo described her university life, how Dawa was kind, and said she would

marry him soon. Tsomo admired her friend's life and, in comparison, considered herself unlucky.


Lhamo encouraged Tsomo to attend vocational school. Tsomo knew attending the school might positively change her life but worried she was too old. Locally, it was considered shameful for a twenty-four-year-old woman to attend school. Lhamo tried to reassure her, "Don't worry too much. Age is just a number."

Tsomo silently nodded as her friend gazed at her, hoping she would say something more, but she didn't. Tsomo invited Lhamo and her boyfriend to stay the night at her home, but they politely refused and left, claiming they were busy.

That night, Lhamo read the Chinese version of *Educated* by Tara Westover under a lamp in bed in her quarters at school as Dawa snored next to her. She was so engrossed she was not disturbed by his snores.

34

LOVE AT DREAM LAKE

t was a cool morning with light rain. Everything was so calm. Han Han sat near a window in a back corner of the Village Café, opened his computer, and tried to read *Animal Farm*. A bird unceasingly chirped in a tree near the window, distracting Han Han, who periodically sipped a cup of Espresso.

Han Han moved his gaze from his computer to the isolated bird. As a gentle breeze made the tree sway, the bird gripped the twig it was perched on more securely.

"What a lonely bird! No one understands its life, despite its desperation," he thought.

Han Han was eager to incarnate as a bird and immediately join the bird outside the window to share companionship. He carefully concentrated on the bird, hoping it would feel someone was conscious of it.

A young waitress refilled his cup. As Han Han thanked her, he gazed at the tree again. The bird was gone. He had expected to listen again to the bird, but unfortunately, that was now impossible. He sipped his coffee and sighed.

The waitress pulled a pack of cigarettes from her fashionable jeans, lit one, and handed another to a young waiter, who put the cigarette behind one ear and said, "Thanks."

"Today, he's alone again. Where's Fei fei? Probably they broke up," the waitress speculated.

"I don't think they were romantically involved. They often came for breakfast as ordinary friends," replied the waiter.

The young waitress agreed, "You're right. Han Han never paid for Fei fei."

"But have you noticed Han Han has been unhappy since Fei fei no longer comes with him?" the young waiter murmured.

Han Han was the sole customer and could hear each note of the café's melancholy music and the conversation between the waitress and waiter. Disturbed, he groaned and left.

Han Han had habitually gone to the library with Fei fei until she no longer replied to his messages and phone calls, disappearing from his life.

He stood outside the café door and debated whether to go to the library or visit the old cobbler. Finally, he decided to visit the old man. He liked to talk to him when he was lonely.

The old cobbler occupied a place near the main gate of Han Han's university and had a big smile for every student. The students all liked him and thought he was

a happy old man. Only Han Han knew he was not as happy as many thought. He and the old man shared their loneliness and felt better when they chatted.

The old cobbler was repairing a red sports shoe clamped between his knees. A big smile spread across his wrinkled face when he noticed Han Han approaching. He paused and told Han Han to sit on a small wooden stool next to him that he often directed customers to sit on. After tugging at glue stuck to a cracked index finger, he took a small pipe from his yellow jacket pocket, lit it, took a few puffs, and handed it to Han Han, inviting him to try.

Han Han took the pipe and said forlornly, "Why not?"

Immediately deducing something was amiss, the cobbler asked, "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

Not wanting his old friend to worry, Han Han replied, "I'm fine."

The old man stared at him and said, "It's great if you are fine. I won't worry about you. You're a real man and can deal with anything!"

Han Han thought, "He's right. I am a real man!" and immediately felt better.

Han Han liked to visit the old man because he often said things like this. Han Han wanted to keep chatting but left when he noticed another red sport shoe near the cobbler.

Puzzled by Han Han's abrupt departure, the cobbler puffed his pipe several times and resumed fixing the red shoe. Han Han glanced back at the old man before entering the school gate. He was busy on the shoe and puffed vigorously as smoke swirled through his white hair and vanished. Han Han was attracted by this scene, paused, and entered the campus, hoping the old cobbler would have a good day.

Han Han had met Fei fei three months earlier in the school library. Short and plump, she often wore a black skirt in summer. Over time, he realized Fei fei had no friends and ate in the school's cafeteria only after other students had finished their meals and left. He imagined she did not want others to laugh at her in the cafeteria, so one day he approached her and struck up a conversation. They maintained contact and became more intimate as time passed. Fei fei eventually confided that sometimes she wanted to end her life. This touched Han Han, and they grew closer.

Once, after Fei fei had phoned him, they met and walked to the school sports field, joyfully chatting as they circled the field. He recalled Fei fei had shown interest in a pair of red sports shoes. Knowing she did not want to spend her parents' money on such indulgences, he challenged, "Let's compete!"

Fei fei smiled, "What kind of competition?"

"Running! I'll buy something you like if you win. If I win, you can take me to the Village Café and pay for coffee."

Fei fei was sure she would win and declared, "Deal!"

She ran slowly in front of Han Han, turned, and urged, "Han Han! Run quickly! You're a man! Catch up with me!"

Han Han was delighted to hear this and slowed, wanting to hear it again. He pretended not to have heard clearly, "What did you say? Please say it loudly."

Fei fei loudly encouraged, "You're a man! Catch up with me!" giving him a warm feeling.

A bit later, he lay sprawled on the ground, defeated, gazing at the sky discolored by urban pollution. He smiled as Fei fei's encouragement re-echoed in his mind. He gazed at her as she lay next to him, hoping stars would appear before she wanted to leave the field.

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Han Han now strolled around the sports field track alone, listening to music. He recalled having made the same circuit numerous times with Fei fei and suffered from that memory. He paused and looked around. A boy sitting under a tree near the field entrance came into view. He walked over to the boy, who seemed unhappy. He was wearing earphones and was listening to something. Han Han spoke to him, "Hello. Are you a foreigner?"

"I'm not a foreigner. I'm a Tibetan," the boy asserted.

"I'm Han Han, but others don't call me Han Han."

The boy said, "I'm Drashi. Call me Ka Ka. What do others call you?"

Han Han hesitated and then, with embarrassment, said, "They call me Sissy."

Ka Ka looked at Han Han's double-lidded eyes and flawless face and exclaimed, "No! You're handsome and tall. Maybe others are jealous of your good looks, but you aren't a sissy. You're a real man! Ignore what others say about you."

Han Han felt great and thanked him.

Ka Ka gazed at Han Han, whose good looks had captured his attention.

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Bao Bao, Han Han's roommate, was on the train from Chengdu to Xi'an and happened to sit next to Fang Fang. They chatted till Bao Bao disembarked at the Xi'an Train Station. Fang Fang was heading to Xining City, where she studied, but she asked for Bao Bao's WeChat contact before they parted.

Bao Bao had a girlfriend and was afraid she would find out if he often chatted with Fang Fang, who sent him messages every night. Even when he did not reply, she continued sending messages, so Bao Bao decided to introduce her to Han Han.

Fang Fang called Han Han several times. When he didn't answer, she sent him messages through WeChat. Han Han randomly replied, wanting to keep chatting with her to make them both happier, but he did not want to be trapped in a relationship leading to marriage, which he knew was her goal.

Initially, he had been interested. They had regularly chatted for at least two hours, and he enjoyed it. Over time, Fang Fang began to bicker with him and complain, "You're interested in others," and so on.

Han Han wanted to avoid quarrelling and recalled visiting a neighbor with his parents on the second day of the New Year. They sat around a table and chatted and periodically laughed loudly. Han Han was so embarrassed that his face turned crimson when he noticed his parents were not talking to each other. His father, a successful businessman, owned two large shopping malls. His mother was a

government official. Locals thought his parents were a model couple with a happy family. Han Han suffered because his parents did not talk to each other at home and slept in different bedrooms.

One night, after Ka Ka called him, he walked into his room and chatted joyfully and loudly with him. Suddenly, some boys rushed out of their rooms, thinking a woman was in the dorm. They imagined her to be beautiful and were eager to see her. Disappointed to find Han Han, they whispered to each other and exited.

Han Han resented the students making fun of him, but he never showed anger, hoping for acceptance.

When Han Han fell asleep during his English class the next day, his teacher noticed and shouted, "Han Han! What the heck's wrong with you? What did you do last night?"

Han Han jerked up his head and said quietly, "I did nothing."

His teacher did not understand what he had said. Imagining he had said something disrespectful, he shouted, "Sissy! This is not your home. Go stand at the back of the classroom!"

His classmates laughed as he shuffled to the back of the classroom.

After class, Han Han stayed as his classmates left for lunch. He was deeply disturbed, humiliated, and pondered what to do. Heading to a classroom window, he put his left foot on the window sill and pulled himself up with his hands. Just as he started to lift his right foot, his phone rang. It was Ka Ka. Han Han answered but said little. Finally, he agreed to meet Ka Ka at Happy Bar.

Ka Ka later took Han Han to Happy Bar almost every Friday night. He got drunk for the first time in his life with Ka Ka at Happy Bar. He enjoyed the feeling and was happy to drink with him. Drunkenness helped him forget his troubles. Once, he even found himself in a room in the Simple Love Hotel with him. He was still drunk and did not remember what had happened that night.

Entering Happy Bar one night, Han Han was immediately immersed in the usual odor of cigarettes and alcohol. He inhaled and looked around for Ka Ka. Many young people were dancing crazily and drinking. Someone asked him to sit with them, but he ignored them and continued searching for Ka Ka. Eventually, he found him sitting alone at the back of the bar with two bottles of beer and two glasses on a table.

Ka Ka slowly filled the glasses with beer when he saw Han Han. They smiled at each other and chatted. They finished two bottles and ordered five more.

Han Han noticed a smiling young woman sitting with a boy, holding his hand. She seemed very happy. Scrutinizing her, he suddenly realized it was Fei fei. He refilled his glass and approached Fei fei, who was embarrassed. Han Han drunkenly asked, "Why didn't your reply to my messages?"

Fei fei said nothing but held up her glass to Han Han, who looked at her boyfriend and laughed. After several toasts, he returned to his table.

Han Han ordered five more beers. Ka Ka urged him to stop, but he did not. He drank two more bottles and, now dizzy, could no longer control his drunken

AHP #65 རྒྱ་ཁྱེད་ལྷན་ *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གུ་རུ་ཤེན་ལམ་ Gu ru 'phrin las
movements. Ka Ka asked, "Are you drunk?"

Han Han loudly said, "No!"

Ka Ka, disbelieving this, urged, "Great! Stop here! Please don't get drunk!"

Han Han put his hand on Ka Ka's shoulder, declaring, "I'm not a pussy. I'm a real man. What do you think, Ka Ka?"

Ka Ka held his hand and said, "You're a real man!"

Ka Ka wanted to say more, but Han Han's laughter interrupted him. It was the first time Ka Ka had heard Han Han laugh.

From across the room, Fei fei noticed Ka Ka holding Han Han's hand and was glad someone was kind to him. Claspng her boyfriend's hand, they left the bar.

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One evening a few hours after the rain stopped one autumn day, Han Han and Ka Ka sat under the tree where they had first met. Ka Ka leaned against the tree as Han Han lay on his back, with his head in Ka Ka's lap. They were listening to the same music, sharing one set of earphones. A gentle breeze made the leaves tremble and rustle, sending some flitting through the air around them. Han Han looked at the leaves dancing in the air. One eventually gracefully twisted and turned and settled on his chest. He picked up the leaf, sniffed it, spun it between his thumb and index finger, and offered it to Ka Ka, who sniffed it before putting it in his shirt pocket.

Ka Ka showed Han Han a picture of Dream Lake on his phone. In the picture, a young couple sat on a white yak near the shore of a blue, boundless lake. The woman's hands were in the air, holding a red scarf behind the man. The red scarf fluttered as birds flew overhead.

Han Han could hear the lapping of the lake water and the birds' chirps. He could feel warm water touching his feet as he held Ka Ka's hand and walked into the lake.

35

NO ESCAPE

hamo was a thirty-year-old herder, mother of two children, and a filial daughter. Nevertheless, she rejected persuasion from her mother, Dekyi, and others who were kind to her and urged her to divorce her irresponsible, cruel husband. No one understood why Lhamo refused to divorce her heartless husband until a government clerk met Lhamo.

Lhamo was born into a prosperous family and had a promising future. She enjoyed a happy childhood with her humorous, affable father and thought she was the luckiest girl in the world.

Time passed.

One overcast winter day, three men with rifles across their backs rode to Lhamo's family's tent. Lhamo, a young child at the time, noticed bloodstains on their boots and sheep-skin robes when they neared the family tent, leading another horse that carried something large wrapped in black fabric. Blood trickled down the horse's belly.

Dekyi came out of the tent when the family's watchdog began barking furiously. She assumed it was her husband, who had gone to join a battle over grassland a few days earlier. She fainted when she realized her husband was not among the three riders, and his horse was carrying his corpse.

The next day, Lhamo stared at her father's corpse wrapped in white cloth on the right side of the tent. She pointed and asked, "Mother, what's that?"

No answer.

Lhamo wondered why her mother did not respond and why tears trickled down her cheeks. She approached the corpse and reached out to touch it, but her mother quickly took Lhamo in her arms and carried her outside.

Later, Lhamo dropped out of junior high school to marry Drashi. Dekyi did not oppose her decision. After all, Lhamo was her only, dearly loved child.

Early every morning, Drashi would get up to drive the family's yaks out to graze after breakfast.

One hot summer day, while Lhamo and her mother were washing their hair and clothes in a stream, a neighbor woman came and joined them. After washing their hair, they began chatting. The neighbor asked, "Where's Drashi?"

"He's herding," Dekyi said proudly.

"Is he kind to you?" asked the neighbor.

"Yes, he is very kind to Lhamo and me. He takes care of us," said Dekyi. "He

never asks us to herd the yaks."

The neighbor paused and said, "I've heard he is unfilial, a gambler, and his family expelled him from their home."

Dekyi was startled, "No! He's a good person and never gambles. Maybe you confused him with someone else."

Lhamo's face turned red when she heard this. She pretended she had heard nothing and resumed washing clothes.

Dekyi interrupted their conversation when she saw Drashi descending a nearby mountain to come home for lunch and ran to the tent without saying goodbye to the neighbor, who gazed at Dekyi's back as she entered the tent. A bit later, smoke swirled above the black yak-hair tent.

Five years later, Lhamo had a son and then a daughter. Lhamo loved and spoiled them as they grew, but they resented her, making her unhappy.

One night when Lhamo noticed a yak was missing, she entered the tent and scolded her husband, who was eating a bowl of noodles, "A yak is missing. You didn't herd the yaks very well recently. Go find it!"

The son spoke impertinently to his mother, "Father needs to rest. He's hungry and has to eat supper."

The daughter added, "He's right. You never herd yaks! You should search for the missing yak."

Drashi put the bowl of noodles down and silently headed to the tent door. His son grabbed his sleeve, "Father, it's getting dark. Wolves will attack you! Don't go look for the yak."

Drashi kissed the boy's forehead, "It's okay. Your father is a big man. Wolves are afraid of me!"

Standing next to her brother, the daughter held a bowl of noodles. But when her father did not kiss her, she dropped her bowl. Gripping the lower part of her father's sheep-skin robe, she wailed, "Father, don't go! If I lose my father... if wolves eat you, I won't have a father!"

Drashi held her and kissed her several times, said, "You know your father is brave and not afraid of wolves. I'll kill the wolves if they attack me!"

His children were still unconvinced, so he gave them his cell phone and told them to watch cartoons. They smiled and jumped into the air when he handed over the phone.

When the watchdog began barking a few hours later, Dekyi asked, "Lhamo, go check. Maybe it's Drashi."

"It's dark. I'm afraid to go alone."

Dekyi then told her grandchildren to go out with their mother, but they refused.

"Wolves will eat your mother if you don't go with her," Dekyi said.

They ignored this and continued watching a cartoon. Lhamo picked up a rope wanting to beat her unloving children but then paused and left the tent, angry at

them for not accompanying her.

September. Locals were busy talking about the price yaks were bringing when they were sold to autumn buyers. Some local young people sold yaks, bought new cars with the cash, and aimlessly drove back and forth in the community.

Dekyi agreed with Drashi that he could drive twenty of their family's yaks to the county town and sell them with his peers, who were also selling their families' yaks.

The next day, Lhamo's maternal uncle visited and tried to persuade Dekyi privately not to allow Drashi to sell the yaks with his peers, believing that Drashi would gamble with the money from selling the yaks. Dekyi was angry with her brother for these thoughts. Unable to change Dekyi's mind, her brother left.

Lhamo's neighbor slaughtered a yak in late autumn as he did every year and gave a chunk of meat to Lhamo. Lhamo cut the meat in half and cooked beef noodles with some of the meat. She wrapped the remaining meat in a plastic bag and put it in a pot.

Three days later, Dekyi smelled something spoiled and found the bag of meat. When she saw worms wiggling inside, she told Lhamo to feed the meat to the watchdog.

Lhamo wanted to explain that she had kept it for Drashi, who had left home five days earlier but decided not to argue with her mother and stepped outside.

A few days later, Lhamo's cousin, Wanlo, drove a motorcycle to the township town and returned home the next day. When she heard a motorcycle, Lhamo rushed out of the tent, stopped her cousin near her tent, and asked, "Did you phone Drashi?"

Before replying, Wanlo unwrapped a black scarf covering his mouth, "I called him. He said he was in Shanghai."

"Impossible! He doesn't speak Chinese. He's never been to a Chinese city!" Lhamo exclaimed.

"He was with his friends. Some of them can speak a little Chinese. I talked to a man with Drashi. They seemed happy to travel with Drashi, who promised to pay for everything," Wanlo confided.

That night over supper, Lhamo kept her head down. Looking at her, Dekyi said, "It's your fault. He'll spend all the money."

Lhamo said nothing.

"Your father, had he been alive, would have introduced you to a good man, but you didn't listen," continued her mother.

Lhamo began sobbing.

"Foolish girl! It's too late to cry. Divorce him when he returns!" said Dekyi.

The next day, Lhamo was herding yaks on a mountain with Dzebo, who asked, "Is Drashi back?"

Lhamo hesitated before replying, "No, he'll return soon, I guess."

"Well, I heard he was in a city. I told you he's not a good person, but you didn't believe me. I'm sure he'll return when he's out of money," Dzebo lectured.

Lhamo could not believe her husband was in Shanghai, recalling that he had promised to buy her a coral necklace after selling the yaks.

Dekyi, feeling ill the next gloomy day, remained in bed, so Lhamo cooked meat soup and fed her mother with a small spoon. After a few spoons of soup, Dekyi slept. Tears filled Lhamo's beautiful eyes as she looked at her mother's pale face.

Lhamo poured a bowl of soup for each of her children and tried to have some soup herself, but she had no appetite, so she left the tent to drive the yaks back.

The yaks were scattered in the valley. Dark clouds tumbled in a sky of thunder. She looked up periodically while driving the yaks back home when suddenly heavy rain fell as lightning flashed and thunder boomed. She was afraid but remembering her children were also frightened by thunder and lightning, she walked as fast as possible.

Crossing a muddy slope, she slipped, staining her clothes. She was soon completely soaked and cold. Water dripped from her robe that was so heavy she could not walk quickly.

When Lhamo approached the family tent, she saw her son crying at the tent entrance. Believing something terrible had happened, she trotted to the tent and went inside. Kneeling next to her mother, she called her name.

No answer.

She hurriedly left the tent, moaned piercingly, and clawed the ground while crouching near the tent door. Thunder roared furiously, and lightning lit up the sky. Lhamo ignored these frightening events and continued grieving in the heavy rain.

When locals came to offer condolences, Lhamo was embarrassed when they asked about Drashi. Sometimes she thought her mother and relatives were right and that she should divorce. "Maybe life will be better if I live with my children without him," she thought.

Lhamo waited for twenty days. With no news about Drashi, it seemed he had disappeared from her life.

Two months later, the community leader, Dralo, came to Lhamo's tent and said that the local officials would divide some government money among community members at his home the next day. He invited her to participate.

Lhamo rode a horse to Dralo's tent the next morning. Embarrassed to be the only woman who had come to collect the money, she was startled to see Drashi.

That night, the children happily sat on Drashi's lap, wrapped their arms around his neck, and kissed him. Lhamo watched with teary eyes.

The next day, Lhamo milked the yaks and gazed at Drashi, who got on his motorcycle and left without a goodbye.

A township government official and a female government clerk visited Lhamo at noon. The leader was Chinese and could not speak Tibetan. The clerk was Lhamo's relative.

The clerk translated, "Sister, how much money did your family get this time?"

"My family received 1,376 RMB," replied Lhamo.

The clerk translated what Lhamo said, and the Chinese official silently nodded and said no more.

Lhamo offered milk tea.

The unmarried clerk had rejected many engagements, believing a single woman had freedom. She gave Lhamo's children some candy. They smiled and ran out of the tent. The clerk watched them. After a while, she chatted with Lhamo outside, and then they left.

The clerk could not sleep that night, thinking about Lhamo's saying, "I know it's better to divorce, but my children love and need him."

The clerk rolled over in her bed. She admired Lhamo. "What a great mother! She can endure male domination and is so devoted to her children!" she thought.

She sighed, turned off the lamp on a small table near her bed, and covered her head with a blanket. Still unable to sleep, she recalled her answer when Lhamo had asked why she didn't marry, "I don't want to marry a man who will spend all the money I earn, not be responsible for our family, and who will dominate his wife."


She thought for a long time but found no perfect solution. "Maybe Lhamo is right. Life works in its way, not how we expect and hope," she decided.

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A sunny morning five years later, the clerk asked her two sons to dress well. A few minutes later, as they walked to the garage, she told the boys to sit in the back to avoid a quarrel over who would ride in front, started the car, and drove to Lhamo's home.

36

SATURDAY

t's a cloudy, overcast Saturday, a time most university students enjoy, sleeping late to reduce study pressures, but I woke in the early morning from a nightmare: I was wearing handcuffs and in great pain. I had raped a schoolmate.

At the beginning of this new day, I had no desire to brush my teeth and wash my face.

I forgot to mention that Saturday is my favorite day, not just because I can rest but also because I don't have to encounter my uninterested, bored classmates in a noisy, cramped classroom. Saturday means I can avoid isolation and dehumanization. Only Saturdays bring me a little joy.

Most of my schoolmates call me Weird Man, but my name is Han Han. I am a nearsighted, slender, tall, unattached twenty-one-year-old who wears thick-lensed glasses. I often walk with my head down and hold my hands behind me like an old man.

I found an interest when I was fifteen that troubles me. I have a strong tendency to invoke history with whomever I encounter. Some students were interested during the first semester when we first met but afterward, they realized I'd tell them what they already knew, and their interest quickly evaporated.

People also dislike being friends with me because I act strangely. I once shaved a strip of hair from my forehead to the back of my neck. Students laughed and gawked at me. I hated their reaction but mostly ignored it. I do pretty much what I want and keep whatever new hairstyle I happen to be in love with.

I am interested in a schoolmate, but I'm sure she is embarrassed to see me as she no longer replies to my messages. I sometimes ask myself, "What's the purpose of being different?" I hate myself for losing her.

I sometimes have breakfast in the school diner with an effeminate boy whose dorm room adjoins mine. We never go shopping together. He dresses fashionably and doesn't want to be seen with a bumpkin like me outside the campus.

This Saturday morning, I go to his dorm room. He is asleep. Not wanting to wake him, I opt to have breakfast alone at a restaurant near my school gate.

I hate to go to the library on Saturdays, so after breakfast, I retreat to my room, lie on my bed, and begin playing a game on my cell phone. Feeling bored after a while, I recall I haven't gone to the gym for a few days. Deciding it's better to be at the gym than playing games, I consider biking there. It's a bit far from my school.

However, I never ride a bike on snowy and rainy days. It's dangerous. I don't want to injure myself or pay someone a lot of money if I hit them after losing control of the bike.

I board a crowded bus and grip a strap handle near a young, seated guy, who squints at me, loses interest, and continues to listen to music on his iPhone. An old man with a wrinkled face beneath sprawling white hair gets on at the next bus stop. The young guy gives him his seat. The young guy's fashionable clothes, a bunch of red tattoos on his neck, and dyed yellow hair made me think he's a hooligan. Well, maybe he is, but he respects old people. My distaste melts into admiration.

Maybe you think I'm crazy, but I hate that old man who gave not so much as a smile in appreciation or a "thank you" to the young man. Instead, he plopped down impatiently and avoided looking at the young man. If I were the young guy, I'd strangle him. I don't want to see that old scum again.

I reach the gym, check in, and walk into the locker room where some naked, middle-aged men have just finished showering and sit puffing cigarettes on a couple of benches. I detest public smokers. I want to scold them for being impolite, but it's not courteous to scold elders. I change into my gym clothes.

Of the few people in the gym, I only recognize a foreigner who is often there. I want to talk to him and practice my oral English. I forgot to tell you that my major is English, so I wanted to chat with him, but instead, I opted to run on the treadmill for an hour. After just fifteen minutes, I feel bored to death, so I do sit-ups until I sweat.

Most people in the gym are looking at their cell phones, so I take out my iPhone from a pocket in my shorts and watch *Game of Thrones*. Shortly after, I think, "Silly! Why are you spending gym time watching a film?!"

I decide to shower and head to the locker room but suddenly realize I've not spoken to the foreigner. I approach and greet him. He returns my greeting, but I quickly discern he is not interested in chatting with me. I have a strong sense of dignity and say goodbye.

Back in the locker room, I take off all my clothes and unconsciously cover my penis with my towel. I don't know what drives me to behave this way. Maybe it's because I'm a virgin and easily embarrassed. I despise this action. I only shower when a few people are in the shower room, but today some young men are showering happily. One sings loudly, and the others follow him. Usually, I'm not too fond of loud human noises in public places, but I enjoy listening to these young men sing.

I turn on my shower and question why I'm not happy like others. I try to sing, but I can't. Maybe I'm afraid someone will shout at me to shut up. Anyway, I don't sing.

The happy guys finish showering and go into the locker room. I carefully observe them. I have no idea where they are from. One has long hair. The others have short hair. Two wear earrings. They dress differently. Probably, they are not from the same place or country, but they sang the same song. I imagine they must be from a

peaceful, joyful place. I want to travel there, be as happy as they are, and sing freely like them.

I walk out of the gym, hoping to encounter those high-spirited young men on my way back to my university. I look in every direction, but I don't see them. I arrive at an intersection with no traffic light. People carefully cross because it's snowing. I cross the road and notice people circling a man lying on the street. I assume there has been a traffic accident. I go near the young man on the ground. He is wearing an old pair of jeans with a white-rope belt. Some older men say he was not hit by a car. They say he has been lying here for almost an hour. No one dares to go near him. I guess he is mentally deranged.

Then a man in his fifties approaches and speaks to him, but he doesn't respond. A man in the crowd shouts, "Don't touch him! You'll get in trouble!"

The man in his fifties doesn't touch him. Instead, he phones the police. After a bit, the man on the ground raises his head, takes a phone out of a pocket, and chats. I realize he is normal except for a lazy eye. A police car soon zooms up and parks nearby. Two policemen approach and talk to the man on the ground who now stands.

I want to know what's wrong with him, but I'm afraid the policemen will yell at me to stay away. The police tell the man to get into their car and then drive away.

The man who called the police says, "He has no money to buy a bus ticket home. The police promised to take him to the bus station and buy him a ticket. His home is only three hours from here."

I thought, "That tricky guy got the police to drive him to the bus station and buy him a ticket! Wow!"

In the late evening, the snow stops. I'm on the street near my university. A mother holds her little boy's right hand. I guess he's about five years old. He holds a small red apple in his left hand. The boy runs from his mother when he sees a red tomato near a garbage bin in the middle of the sidewalk. "Don't pick it up!" his mother shouts and grabs the boy. As they walk around the red tomato, the boy looks back at the tomato. Maybe he thought it was an apple.

A young couple nears the tomato and stops. The girl kicks at it and misses. Her boyfriend stops her, and they resume walking. The boy looks at a garbage collector looking for things she can take to the local recycling center, like plastic bottles. The boyfriend rushes back, picks up the tomato, and puts it on the lid of a garbage bin. He returns to his girlfriend and occasionally glances back. I guess he's hoping the garbage collector will pick up the tomato. Instead, a woman clad in nice clothes puts the tomato in her leather bag. The garbage collector stares at the woman as she walks away and turns a corner.

I walk to a nearby vegetable market and buy a medium-sized, plump, ripe tomato. The stall owner stares at me curiously, probably wondering why I buy only one. I walk back, put the tomato on the garbage bin cover, and stroll to the other side of the street. I hope the garbage collector will pass by again. Some people pass the tomato. They see it but don't touch it. I wait for the garbage collector but then think

I'm silly. She probably went home for supper.


I stand, ready to return to my university, when I notice the nicely-dressed woman putting the tomato in her bag. I shout at her, and she runs away.

As I walk back to my dorm room, I think, "Why did I shout and frighten her?"

It snows again. The night turns chilly. The cold wind pierces my bones. I cover my head with my blanket. I think about Saturday and realize it has been unusual. Some of the people I encountered were very different. I smile and resolve to sleep, hoping nightmares will not torture me.

37

SEVEN YEARS

 didn't interact with Mother for days. She lay covered with her sheep-skin robe on a dry yak skin in the middle of a cabin made of yak-dung bricks near my family's tent. A long cloth pinned to a wall hung over the cabin entrance to resist the chilly wind. Every day, I peeked at Mother through a hole in the fabric and saw her pale face in the dim light that flowed through a square hole in the cabin's wall. She noticed me, gazed at my plump cheeks, and groaned in misery. I couldn't understand this and ran to Grandmother, who was cooking meat soup in our tent.

A bit later, Grandmother headed to the cabin, holding a bowl of meat soup. I followed, but then Father shouted, ordering me to stay back. I could see Father's angry face above the adobe stove, where he warmed himself, sitting cross-legged on the right side of the tent. I was afraid to keep looking at Father and put my head down.

Recalling that my two sisters and brother had gone to fetch water from the nearby Yellow River, I yearned to join them but decided against it when I considered Father's wrathful face. He had once warned me not to fetch water with my siblings, but I had ignored him. He spanked me after we returned home. It was dangerous for a five-year-old boy to bring water from the Yellow River. From that day on, I dared not go without Father's permission.

Older Sister was nine, and Younger Sister was seven. Each carried a wooden bucket full of water on their back. Brother was six and held a big red metal scoop in his right hand. Water had splashed on my sisters' robes, leaving wet spots that had turned dark. They placed the buckets of water on the tent's upper left side with our family's utensils. Brother rubbed his hands continuously. Understanding his hands were cold, Father told him to sit near the stove and warm up. He complied, crying as his hands hurt as they warmed.

Eventually, Grandmother returned with the bowl still half full of meat soup.

Grandmother and I shared her bowl and had two more bowls of meat soup. My two sisters sat next to Grandmother and me on the left side of the tent. They whispered and laughed while eating. Brother quietly ate his soup, sitting next to Father. Sometimes, Brother looked at our sisters, and a smile appeared. I was sure they had had a lot of fun when they were fetching water. I was eager to know all about it.

After our meal, my siblings rushed out of the tent, laughing. I ran after them

but fell to the ground at the tent entrance. I cried and lay on the ground until Grandmother came, picked me up, and kissed me. I kept crying and kicked her belly. She pulled off my sheep-skin robe and leather boots. I was naked and shivering. She put me on her back, inside her sheep-skin robe. I saw the worry on her oily, wrinkled face, so I stopped crying.

Meanwhile, Father rode a sharp-horned black yak and drove our family's yaks back from a nearby high mountain. My sisters and brother helped Father tether the yaks in the enclosure near our tent.

Later, Father entered the tent without my brother and sisters, who often played near the yak enclosure after tethering the yaks. Father took me from Grandmother's back and asked her to attend to Mother. He put me into his sheep-skin robe pouch where it was warm. I touched his chest, studied his big nose, and smiled. He smiled in return.

By now, it was getting dark in the tent. Father lit a butter lamp in front of Buddhist images on our family shrine, in the upper part of the right side of the tent, and prayed to the Three Jewels. I listened to every word.

On the left side of the tent, my sisters and brother were telling folktales and deciphering riddles to see who was the smartest. I wanted to join them and asked Father to help me put on my yak-leather boots and tie my sheep-skin robe with a red sash. I sat next to Brother, listened to their stories, and sometimes dozed. Father chanted scriptures while holding prayer beads in his left hand and spinning a prayer wheel in his right.

Suddenly, we heard a baby cry. My brother and sisters fell silent and rushed to the cabin.

It was a quiet night. Stars glistened around a big moon in a blue-black sky. I went outside and saw a gigantic yak near the cabin under the bright moonlight. I was afraid to walk near the cabin, but my eagerness to see the baby won out. My brother and sisters were huddled at the cabin door, reluctant to enter. A butter lamp flickered near Mother's folded sheep-skin robe pillow. Mother was kneeling, covered with her sheep-skin in bed, and hunched over as she nursed an infant lying on its back on a piece of dried sheep-skin.

Afterward, Grandmother wrapped the baby in the dried sheep-skin and put her in her robe pouch.

I was thrilled to have another sister and rushed back to the tent to report this good news to Father. A big smile decorated Father's face until I added, "It's a girl."

Disappointment immediately registered on Father's face as his smile dissolved. He said nothing, and I kept quiet.

I slept with Father, who didn't fall asleep until midnight. I wondered why he was unhappy to have an adorable daughter, but then I recalled his regular prayer, "Please! The Three Jewels! Bless and help me. I want another son, not another daughter."

I don't know who gave me my first name, but I remember how I got my second name.

One snowy winter morning, as I was walking near our tent yard, Brother shouted at me to get away. He was trying to catch birds and lay on the ground several meters from a plastic basin, propped up by a short stick. He held one end of a long yak-hair rope in his right hand. The other rope end was tied to the stick. A bird pecked at a bit of dry cheese from under the basin, hopped back, and looked around the basin. The bird then tried to pick up another bit of dry cheese from under the basin. I coughed as Brother was about to jerk the rope, and the bird flapped away. Brother stood and shoved me. I fell and cried. Brother ignored me and continued his attempts to catch birds.

I rolled on the ground several times, stood, put two fingers in my mouth, cried, and trotted to our tent, where I found my parents and one of my cousins sitting in the lower part of the right side of the tent, making a new sheep-skin robe for my older sister. She often helped Father herd on rainy and snowy days. She had done this since she was seven. Sometimes, she herded yaks alone when Father was busy with something else. Older Sister's sheep-skin robe had several holes in the lower back. When she herded on rainy and snowy days, her robe would get wet, and holes had formed from repeated drying.

I sat on Mother's lap and continued sobbing. Mother kissed my forehead and put my hands inside her robe and on her belly to warm them. Sitting on Mother's lap was so comfortable, and as my hands warmed, I refused to leave when Mother resumed her work on the sheep-skin robe.

Cousin grabbed me, telling me to let Mother sew. Ignoring him, I continued sitting on Mother's lap. Cousin then dragged me away from Mother and beat the back of my left hand with a dry piece of sheepskin. I ran to Grandmother, sitting on the left side of the tent, hugged her, and sobbed more loudly. When Cousin tried to beat me again, Grandmother shielded me and scolded him. Holding me on her lap, Grandmother consoled, "Don't cry! I promise I'll ask your father to buy you candy next time he goes to town if you stop crying."

I loved candy, so I tried to stop crying but couldn't. My hand hurt a lot. Eventually, I dozed off on Grandmother's lap.

The next day was sunny, and everyone was working industriously. In the morning, my parents and Cousin finished making the sheep-skin robe. My sisters chopped meat into small pieces on a cutting board while Grandmother kneaded dough to make noodles in a basin. Father liked noodles, so they prepared noodles for lunch. Mother's sheep-skin robe covered our baby sister, who lay where Mother slept on a dry yak skin. Brother gently patted her, lulling her to sleep when she cried.

After lunch, when Father decided to visit one of his cousins, I asked him to take me with him. He refused, so I begged. When that didn't work, I rushed to Grandmother, sitting near the tent entrance, chanting scriptures. I told her I wanted to go with Father. Grandmother explained, "You are a child, and children don't visit

other families. Locals will think you are a bad boy if you visit other families with your father. Good boys listen to their parents and stay at home."

After I pleaded and reminded her that Cousin had beaten me the day before, Grandmother relented and asked Father to take me with him.

Father agreed. He mounted a polled black yak with a white spot in the center of its head, and I sat behind him. We rode for three hours to our destination. Father's cousin's neighbor's watchdog was roaming near the neighbor's tent. I kept looking at the dog, afraid it would attack us. Fortunately, the dog trotted behind the neighbor's tent and disappeared.

Father's cousin and wife came out of their tent when their watchdog barked at us. The wife ran over to the dog and grabbed its head, stopping its barks. Father's cousin helped me dismount and led the riding yak to their family's yak enclosure.

As we entered the family's tent, I bashfully gripped the lower part of Father's sheep-skin robe. Several yakskin bags containing barley, rice, and flour were stacked in the tent center. Deity images were positioned on a small adobe square box in the upper part of the tent's right side. A butter lamp flickered in front of the figures. Father's cousin sat beside Father and me on the tent's right side, near the adobe stove. Cousin's wife offered me a small bowl of milk tea that I dared not take. Father smacked my knee and told me to take it. Afraid Father would hit me again if I didn't take the bowl, I accepted it with my right hand and set it on the ground with a red face. Father and his cousin drank several bowls of milk tea as Cousin's wife made meat dumplings. I was extremely thirsty and swallowed several times while watching Father drink his milk tea. I was so timid that I didn't even sip the milk tea in my bowl. I kept my head down and listened to Father and his cousin chat.

When Cousin's wife offered dumplings in a metal basin, Father placed the basin in front of me because I was sitting between him and his cousin. I watched steam rise from the warm dumplings with lowered head, sniffed, and swallowed again. Father's cousin handed me a dumpling when he realized I was too self-conscious to eat. I wiped the sweat from my forehead, took the dumpling, and rolled it in my filthy hands, turning the dumpling dark. Father's cousin said, "Don't be shy. Eat it!"

Not looking at him, I put the dumpling in my robe pouch and mumbled, "I'm not hungry."

Father and his cousin continued chatting while eating. In the end, three dumplings remained in the basin.

As the sun set behind a high mountain, Father and I prepared to leave for home. The family gave me the small bowl the wife had offered me milk tea in when we arrived. A dab of butter was stuck on the bottom of the bowl. I accepted the bowl, understanding it was a gift for my first visit to the family.

As Father and I passed the neighboring tent, their watchdog ran and jumped on and off our riding yak's back. Father pulled out his dog-beater from his robe pouch, a short, thick stick with a hole in one end. A yak-leather rope was threaded

through this hole. Father swung the dog-beater around his head and hit the dog on the head the next time it leaped upon the yak's back.

The neighbor family's head, a tall, strong man, rushed towards us, holding a long stick, and hit the dog with the stick, sending it yowling away. Taking a deep breath, he asked, "Are you okay? Did the dog bite you?"

Father said, "Don't worry. No one is hurt."

The man picked up a big stone, threw it in the dog's direction, and said, "Come have tea in my tent."

Although appreciating his sincere invitation, Father replied, "No, thanks! It's getting dark, and we must return home before it's too dark," and said goodbye.

As we neared our tent, I began crying from the pain in my butt. Surprised, Father asked, "What's wrong with you? Do you miss your mother?"

I just continued sobbing.

When our watchdog barked, Grandmother came out, lifted me off the back of the yak, and asked, "Why are you crying? Are you hungry?"

I said, "Yes, I'm hungry, and my bottom hurts!"

Grandmother untied my sash, pulled down my underwear, inspected my butt, and exclaimed, "It's bleeding!"

She stared at Father and scolded, "Bad father! You didn't take care of your son!"

Father did not reply as he held my hand while we entered the tent. Ordering me to lie facing the ground, he burned a bunch of wool and sprinkled the ash on my wound, which stopped the bleeding.

It was so painful that I couldn't sleep well that night.

The next morning, Cousin came to visit. When Father told him about the dog attack, Cousin advised changing my name. He had heard a story about a boy who often had trouble. His parents had taken the boy to a local lama, who had changed his name. Afterward, there were no more problems. My parents found this convincing, so Father and Cousin decided to visit our local lama and request a new name for me.

At noon, Father and Cousin left on two horses.

Two days later, they returned with a new name for me. From that day, I was called Tsering.

...

Several months later, it was time to move from the winter to the summer pasture. I sat behind Grandmother on a black horse. My older sisters and Brother rode yaks, while my parents rode horses and drove our yaks. Youngest Sister was crying inside Mother's robe on her back. Mother and Father were busy with a pack yak dragging a canvas bag that had fallen from its back. Mother had no time to nurse the baby.

Our watchdog drooled with a hanging tongue as it followed us. When the dog got near us, our horse suddenly kicked it and bolted, sending me tumbling to the ground where a clump of dry yak-dung struck my throat, bruising it and making it

swell.

Grandmother didn't sleep well that night because my throat was painful. She thought I would die and blamed herself for not controlling the horse.

Another time, now at the summer pasture, just like every day, I woke, rubbed my eyes, dressed, and went out to pee. Grandmother held her prayer wheel in her left hand and chanted scriptures near the tent entrance. I went out and gazed at Mother and my older sisters milking yaks in the yak enclosure.

Older Sister ordered Second Sister to tie a calf after it had nursed its mother for a few minutes. Second Sister pulled the calf from its mother by its neck-rope and twisted its tail with her right hand. The calf jerked and stepped on Second Sister's right foot. Second Sister lost control of the calf, lifted her foot in agony, and turned in circles on her right foot. Tears coursed down her unwashed face as she squinted at Oldest Sister, who rushed to the calf, pulled it from its mother, tied it, and kicked it in the belly.

Ignoring Second Sister's sobs, Mother continued milking a white yak while I walked over to Grandmother.

Father had breakfast alone. After Mother and my sisters finished milking, he would drive our yaks to a high grassy mountain far from our tent. Father woke Brother and asked him to tend to Baby Sister, who was sleeping on the tent's left side.

I sat next to Grandmother, who was reciting something. I wondered why she chanted so often, so I asked. Looking into my eyes, she said, "I'm chanting scripture."

"Why do you chant scripture so often?"

Grandmother replied, "Good people chant scripture. Bad people don't."

I embraced Grandmother, "Please teach me some scriptures. I want to be a good person like you!"

Grandmother smiled, stroked my head, and began teaching me, but then Baby Sister cried. I ran over to her, kissed her forehead, and gently patted her tummy until she stopped crying.

After breakfast, Mother put some candy and fried bread in a plastic bag. Handing it to Brother, she sent us off to herd the calves, which we drove to a valley near our tent.

At noon, we ate the candy. We put the bread in the stream to soften it and ate it all. The calves grazed near the stream, although some came near us and sniffed when I peed.

There were small pools near the creek from which Brother caught frogs and put them into another pool. I was afraid to catch frogs and was terrified when one leaped over my feet and plopped into a pool. I picked up a piece of dried yak dung and flung it at the frog, which rolled over, showing its white belly.

After a while, a boy with long, tangled, dirty hair joined us. He took off his sheep-skin robe. Clad in long red underwear and a black shirt, he joined Brother in catching frogs. An hour later, while gazing at me, he asked Brother, "Is he your

brother?"

"Yes, he's my brother."

Tossing his long hair back over his right shoulder, he asked me, "Why is your hair so short? Are you a real man?"

Not knowing what to say, I said nothing.

Brother pushed that boy declaring, "He's my brother. Of course, he's a real man!"

The boy pushed Brother, who punched him in the face and grabbed his messy hair. Crying, the boy hurriedly put his robe under his left arm and raced toward his family's calves.

When we were about to drive our calves back home in the early evening, Brother cautioned, "Don't tell our parents that I punched the boy."

Sensing an opportunity, I stared into Brother's big, round eyes and replied, "I won't if you tell me folktales tonight."

He nodded in agreement, and together we drove the calves back home.

After dinner, I sat on Father's lap and asked, "Father, do you love me?"

He looked into my eyes, "Of course, I love you."

I said, "I want to have long hair. Don't cut my hair next time it grows long."

"Why do you want to have long hair?"

"I want to be a real man."

Father chuckled and sipped milk tea from a dragon-decorated bowl.

After dinner, Brother and I shared Brother's and Father's sheepskins and slept side by side. I asked Brother to tell me some folktales.

He paused and said, "I'm tired. I'll tell you next time."

I begged him, but he slept, so I told Father that Brother had fought with a boy. Father woke Brother and scolded him, "I told you not to fight with neighbor children. You are so disobedient! I'll have to slap you, or you won't obey me."

Brother pinched the back of my right hand and announced, "He killed a frog today."

Father turned to me, "Bad boy! Why did you do that? Did it eat your food?"

I dared not say anything, pretending I hadn't heard.

I couldn't sleep, worrying Father would beat Brother and me the next morning.

...

It snowed in late October. Water dripped from the top of the tent and streamed through on the floor. Mother used a stick with a bent end to hit the tent top where snow accumulated. I ran out and watched snow fly from the tent as Mother flicked it off. The sunshine was so bright that light from the snow hurt my eyes, so I went back inside.

I saw sweat on Mother's forehead. Brother stood next to Mother and said, "You're sweating. Hand me the stick, and I'll do it."

Mother hit the tent top several more times, handed the stick to Brother, and

said, "Be careful. Don't hurt yourself."

Mother poured milk tea from an old kettle into her and Grandmother's bowls. I walked over and sipped Mother's tea. Looking at her, I noticed sweat running down her face. I handed her the bowl and walked over to Brother. He was also sweating and threw the stick on the ground. I tried to pick it up, but it was so heavy that I couldn't lift it above my shoulders. As I tried to lift it over my head again, the stick fell and struck Brother's head. He angrily kicked my ankle. It was so painful that tears filled my eyes. I bit his right arm. He kicked me again and punched my nose. With a rivulet of blood running from my nose, I ran to Grandmother. She used yak wool to wipe away the blood, stroked my head, and murmured, "Don't cry. Good boys don't cry."

Picking up a stick, Mother headed directly at Brother. Glaring at me, he rushed out of the tent before Mother could catch him. I sobbed for a while. When I stopped, Grandmother said, "You're a good boy. Don't fight your brother, even if he beats you. He's your brother and older than you. You should respect him. It'll disgrace our family and destroy your reputations if others see you two fight."

I nodded, agreeing, "Yes. My nose hurts. I'll not fight Brother again."

Brother didn't come home the whole day. Instead, he went to our neighbor's tent. In the early evening, I missed him. I searched for him and saw he was helping my aunt fetch water. I wanted to play and called him, but he ignored me, so I played with my older sisters.

At sundown, Brother climbed the mountain where Father was herding yaks.

At dinner, Mother told Father about our clash. Father stared at Brother and said, "I'll beat you to death if you fight your brother again. Today, I won't beat you because you helped me drive the yaks home."

A few days passed, and the snow melted.

Then one chilly morning, Mother urged Father to get up, declaring, "Someone has stolen ten yaks!"

Father dressed quickly and told Brother to call my aunt's son, who was in his twenties. "Did you see my dog-beater?" he asked Mother, who located it under a mat.

Ten minutes later, Cousin entered our tent with a rifle slung on his back. Looking at it, I asked, "Why is that rifle on your back?"

"I'm going to kill thieves."

"Why do you want to kill thieves?"

"Because I'm a real man. You should be a real man like me when you're an adult."

I nodded in agreement.

Cousin stopped talking, picked up a saddle from the lower part of the tent, and carried it outside. Father grabbed another saddle and followed. Brother and I watched Father and Cousin saddle two horses and ride eastward.

Two days later, as my family was having lunch, my family's watchdog barked. I ran outside and saw Father and Cousin driving thirteen yaks toward our tent. I

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shouted, "Father and Cousin are back!"

Father and Cousin dismounted and came inside after tying their horses near our tent. When Brother and I went to drive the yaks into a valley where my family's other yaks were, Brother announced, "Three of these yaks are not our family's!"

Not knowing which yaks were ours, I asked, "Which ones are not ours?"

He pointed to two black-polled female yaks and a big, sharp-horned yak. I looked at these three yaks carefully and ran back home.

Father was having milk tea, sitting next to Cousin as they waited for Mother to finish cooking noodles with beef. Sitting next to Cousin, I declared, "Three of those yaks aren't our family's."

Cousin looked at me, "I told you I'm a real man. I aimed my rifle at the thieves, who fearfully begged me not to kill them. They said they'd give us three yaks if I didn't shoot them."

As I looked silently at Cousin, he asked, "Do you think I'm a real man?"

"Oh, yes, you're a real man! I want to be a real man like you."

I admiringly looked at Cousin's rifle lying against a yak saddle on the right side of the tent. As I was about to touch the rifle, Grandmother shouted, "Don't touch it!"

I was shocked and cried.

Cousin looked at me and sneered, "Coward! You're not a real man."

I was unhappy and had no appetite that night. I asked Grandmother, "Am I a cowardly boy?"

She said, "You're a good boy and a real man."

I felt better and announced, "I'm hungry."

Ignoring me, Mother asked Father, "Who are the thieves?"

After a bit, Father said, "My sworn brother and one of his cousins."

"What bad people!" Mother said angrily.

Father started to say something but stopped and heaved a sigh.

I knew Father's sworn brother, a strong, tall man with long hair, a beard, and a pointed nose. A few weeks earlier, he visited Father and gave candy to my siblings and me. I liked him and called him "Uncle." Grandmother had said, "Uncle is a good man."

I looked at unhappy Father, sat on Grandmother's lap, and asked, "Is Uncle a good man? Mother said he's a bad man."

"Your mother's right. He's a bad man. Never betray anyone. Be a good boy. Good boys are born in Heaven in the next life."

Father remained silent, and other family members didn't say anything.

After a while, we slept.

...

A year passed. I was now seven and started a new journey.

Brother and I swam naked in a brook near our tent one hot summer day. The water came up to our knees. As I lay in the water, my belly scratched a stone. When

I saw blood on my stomach, I cried and ran home.

Entering the tent, I noticed a large-mouthed visitor with a dark complexion wearing a fabric robe sitting next to Father on the right side of the tent. I later learned he was my tribe's leader, and his brother taught Tibetan in our local primary school.

The leader stopped talking to Father, looked at me, and counseled, "Don't cry. You're a good boy. Good boys never cry."

Although I felt a lot of pain, I stopped crying. I imagined he would think I was a bad boy if I continued crying.

The leader said, "I said you're a good boy. See, you stopped crying."

I was shy and ashamed that I had cried. I squatted next to Grandmother and said nothing.

Grandmother wiped the blood with her hands and said, "Don't swim if your brother asks you to swim with him."

I nodded and kept my head down.

In the late evening, after the leader left, I asked Grandmother why he had visited.

"He announced that you and your brother must enroll in school in September."

I remembered one of my older male cousins had escaped from the local primary school when he was ten and had returned home at night. Cousin's father had scolded him and persuaded him to return. Cousin was reluctant, saying he didn't want to suffer from hunger. "I don't want to go to school. I don't want to starve," I proclaimed.

Grandmother encouraged, "I heard the school's new headmaster is a kind local man who takes good care of the students."

"I don't want to go to school. I'll miss you and my parents," I continued.

"You won't miss us. Your brother must also go to school," said Grandmother.

I wanted to know why, so Grandmother explained, "Your uncle's son was chosen by lottery to go to school, but your uncle wants his son to be a herder. Your brother will go to school in place of your uncle's son; otherwise, the government will punish your uncle."

Father consulted a local lama a few days later, who selected an auspicious day for Brother and me to enroll in school.

Two days before our departure, Father went to the local town and returned home at noon with two pairs of cloth pants, jackets, and long underwear. One set of underwear was red, and the other was gray. Brother and I argued over the gray pair because we thought red underwear was for girls. Eventually, Father persuaded Brother to wear the red pair. Father told us to wash our faces and feet, and then he cut our hair short, above eyebrow level, with a pair of big scissors.

That night, I slept with Grandmother, who advised, "Don't forget to recite scriptures every night at school. You'll be smarter if you chant every night."

"Yes. I'll recite scriptures every night," I promised.


We slept.

The following day, Brother and I got up earlier than usual, dressed, and again washed our faces. After breakfast, Father, Brother, and I offered incense behind my family's tent to bring good luck.

We mounted a white horse, with Brother in front. Father rode a black horse. Mother mounted a black horse with a white spot around one eye. After bidding goodbye to the rest of my family and my aunt and her son, we headed to the township town.

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THE BOY

 got up on a chilly winter morning, pulled on my sheep-skin robe, and rushed out of my family's house. Father was helping Brother drive the yaks out of the enclosure. Brother often drove my family's yaks to the mountains in the morning.

As I peed near my family's yak enclosure, I noticed a gray, small bird pecking at a bone. The bird checked in every direction while pecking the bone. I watched the bird which was near me. I picked up a pebble and threw it, hitting the bird's head, killing it.

I was only five years old and didn't know what to do with the dead bird, so I picked it up and ran to my family's house before Father found out. My family's cat was sleeping near my family's metal stove in the middle of the living room. I offered the dead bird to the cat hoping it would take care of the evidence. It sniffed, turned its head away, closed its eyes, and resumed sleeping.

I saw Father approaching. Worried and feeling very anxious, I kicked the cat's belly, which sent it yowling and racing out of the house.

Blood oozed from the dead bird's beak. I held it in my hand and tried to run out of our house before Father entered, but it was too late.

...

My family moved from summer to winter pasture on the first day of November.

The next day was sunny. My family's and neighbors' yaks were amicably grazing along a small brook near my house. Some yaks were lying near the creek. A few calves ran along the creek.

The only sound was a bird chirping in the distance.

There was one yak in my family's yak enclosure.

After breakfast, my sisters and brother entered my family's yak enclosure. I followed them. I was six years old and scared of yaks. I didn't get near the yaks. I observed them from a distance. One yak was black, four years old, polled, and had a big white blotch on her forehead.

My older sister put a rope through the yak's nose while my younger sister clutched the yak's forehead hair. The yak couldn't move easily. My older sister mounted the yak. Brother handed her the yak's tail, which she clutched in her right hand while tightly holding the rope in her left.

My younger sister moved her hand from the yak's forehead. The yak ran and jumped for several minutes. Eventually, my sister fell and rolled over. My younger

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sister and brother burst into laughter. I laughed too.

It was the best performance I witnessed in my early childhood.

Winter came. Mother had decided to be sterilized a few months after giving birth to my sister, her fifth child.

One evening Father mounted a white horse, and I sat behind him. Mother rode a black, gentle horse with my baby sister in her robe pouch. We left our home and headed to the local township town.

We were in a hurry and rode our horses fast. Once we got to the town at sunset, we put our horses in a big yard belonging to a family friend. Father told him we'd be back in a few days. We soon found a freight truck headed to the county town with a small white Beijing-brand car in the back. The trucker told us to get in the back of the truck, where there were a few folded black yak-hair tents. My parents sat next to one another on folded tents. I leaned against Father and shared his seat.

It got dark. A big moon shone brightly in the blue sky.

While my parents chatted with other passengers, I was so cold my body trembled, and I couldn't speak.

Father asked the driver to stop. We went to the small car. Father opened the front door and explained my situation to the two monks. One monk asked me to sit on his lap. I didn't know him, so I shook my head. Father lifted me and put me on the monk's lap. I remained quiet, even though the monks said a lot to me.

It was warm inside the car. I soon slept on the monk's lap.

It was Saturday. Most students went home after lunch. I never went home on weekends because my family lived far from school. Instead, I wandered about the schoolyard with my friends, who also didn't go home for lunch.

My family didn't have a motorcycle or car. We had to travel for hours on horseback to reach the town where the school was located. My parents came to pick me up only for winter and summer vacations.

That afternoon I had a headache. I lay under the shadow of a tree behind the teaching building and napped.

My Tibetan teacher and a student woke me up. The teacher asked me to go to my dorm, put on my Tibetan robe, and return. I dared not disobey and trotted to my dorm, where I unfolded my robe, dressed up, and returned to the back of the teaching building.

My Tibetan teacher sat with two local government clerks and three people who worked for the county Education Bureau. They drank beverages and bottles of water and chatted with each other in Chinese and Tibetan.

Five other students and I wore robes and stood before them under the scorching sun. We kept quiet and waited for our Tibetan teacher's command. When he gestured for us to start, we danced for around twenty minutes without music, sweating and panting.

The visitors continued to chat, ignoring our performance. Noticing this, our teacher gestured for us to stop.

I didn't stay to listen to their conversations as the other students did. Instead, I rushed back to the big tree where my earlier nap had been interrupted and lay in the shade.

I slept.

Everybody was gone when I awoke,.

...

One winter day, my aunt and neighbor women used trowels to dig up wild baby yams in the half-frozen soil of their yak enclosures. A little six-year-old girl leaned against her mother and raked the ground surface with a yak horn.

My father was sewing robes for my brother and me. When he finished in the early evening, Brother and I put them on and ran inside through the yak enclosures, one by one. The wild yam collectors complimented us on our robes.

We were very happy.

...

I saw a vulture circling above a high mountain top one day and reported this to Grandmother. She assumed an animal had been killed by wolves and told Brother and me to check.

We spent an hour climbing to the top of the mountain, where we found a vulture's carcass. We tried to move it, but it was heavy, and we couldn't move it easily.

Recalling that Father's pipe was made from vulture bones, I untied my yak-hair rope belt and handed it to Brother. He tied the vulture's legs with one end of the rope, and we pulled the dead vulture with the other.

It took us three hours to get home, where Father announced the vulture's bones that could be used to make pipes were broken.

I was upset and angry. All that work for nothing!

...

My family's tent was pitched on the banks of a small river. My parents tethered my family's milk yaks and calves when it got dark. Mother told me to drive a female yak grazing on the opposite bank to our yak enclosure. No bridge spanned what was usually a narrow, shallow stream, but it was summer, the snow had melted in the mountains, swelling the river.

I tried to jump over the river but slipped and fell in. I squeezed water from my clothes and cried.

Feeling angry, I picked up stones and chased the yak, scolding and pelting it with stones.

Suddenly, I heard a loud noise. I thought it would rain, but there was a blue sky and a bright moon when I looked up and saw Cousin riding a motorcycle near my family's yak enclosure. Yaks were frightened by the motorcycle's loud noise and ran away.

The next day, I got up earlier than usual and visited Cousin. The motorcycle


AHP #65 ལྷོག་ལམ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལམ། Gu ru 'phrin las
was in a white tent near his family's black tent. Cousin slept in the white tent.

It was the first time I had seen a motorcycle up close. I warily touched some
of its parts and observed it for around ten minutes.

I sniffed the gasoline. It was nice.

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THE PATRON

t was an overcast, windy winter morning in Yellow River Township Town, situated, as you might guess, on the icy banks of the Yellow River. The water was clear enough to see stones at the river's bottom. A dirt road divided the town in half, with a few shops and restaurants on each side. Only one restaurant was open. The proprietress craned her neck from the restaurant door, scanning up and down the road. She was physically strong, so locals imagined she was also emotionally strong. Some called her "Strong Woman," partly because her tall stature, broad shoulders, long face, big eyes, and prominent straight nose made her resemble a man from a distance.

The street was empty of people and cars. Only a few dogs wandered around. A large, black dog padded to a garbage bin. A red mother dog that didn't use her right hind leg led two puppies. They sniffed a bone near the restaurant before lying around it. One puppy gnawed on the bone while the other two dogs dozed.

The bitch bared her fangs and furiously barked when the black dog approached and gazed at the bone with an open mouth, revealing sharp fangs. It did not bark. Two strings of saliva dripped from the sides of its mouth. Suddenly, a whirlwind materialized, swirling plastic bags, pieces of paper, and saliva strings into the sky.

The woman in her fifties moved back into her restaurant and, sitting at a table next to a stove, began stuffing dumplings with beef mince. She made twenty dumplings every other day. The restaurant owner offered only dumplings that cost one RMB each and complimentary tea to customers. After her husband had passed away from tuberculosis nine years after their marriage, there were few restaurant customers. Sometimes, there were no customers for the whole day.

Her friends advised her to quit the business, but she refused. She wanted to serve a particular regular customer who chatted and sometimes spent the whole day in the restaurant. Recently, he had not come. Feeling she had not seen him for months, she paused while stuffing the dumplings, counted on her fingers, put a piece of beef stuck on her right index finger into her mouth, swallowed, and murmured, "Thirty-six days."

She walked outside and looked around. The only living creatures she saw were the dogs. A robust, dust-laden gust of wind struck her and blew her red scarf off her shoulders. She trotted to where it fluttered on the dusty ground. The scarf bounded into the air when she bent over to pick it up. Finally grabbing it, she rushed

back to her restaurant. She wiped the dust that had settled in her eyes with the scarf's cleaner end. Standing near a window, she looked outside, where a man was throwing stones at the black dog to make the dogs move away from a building with a white-cross hospital symbol painted on the door.

The black dog seized the opportunity grabbed the bone, and ran away. The bitch fiercely barked and tried to bite the black dog's tail and snatch back the bone without success. The bitch and her puppies ran after the black dog.

About a half-hour later, that same man entered the restaurant carrying a plastic bag containing several boxes of medicine. The restaurant was in a building that featured a guest room, kitchen, bedrooms, and a large room where customers ate and drank tea. Two tables were positioned on each side of the restaurant's main door, and another was near the stove in the middle of the room. The man sat near the stove and placed the bag on a table. The restaurant owner poured hot tea into a paper cup from a kettle on the stove and offered it with her right hand. The man took the cup and removed his motorcycle helmet. She looked at the man's deep-set eyes and plump face. Realizing it was her deceased husband's brother, she smiled and said, "Oh! I didn't recognize you until you took off your helmet."

The man looked at her, smiled, sipped the tea, and said nothing.

"What brought you to town?" she asked.

"I came to get medicine for my son. He needs more."

"Your son was well a few days ago when I visited your home."

"When people get tuberculosis, they must follow the doctor's orders and take medicine until they completely recover. It takes about a year."

They chatted until she got up, went to the kitchen, and returned with a plate of steaming dumplings. The pleasant smell of dumplings filled the room. She put the plate on the table and sat opposite the man. They ate the dumplings and enjoyed more conversation.

The man left when it got dark.

...

The woman was an outsider who had come to the town when she was forty-seven and opened the restaurant. She never talked about her parents to locals, who guessed she was an orphan. Three years later, she married a man two years older. After five years of marriage, her husband was diagnosed with spinal tuberculosis and couldn't move his legs. He spent most of his time in bed. Death came after four years of suffering. Some locals criticized her for not giving him better care and medicine regularly. They said she was focused on her business instead.

Her brother-in-law thought differently. He said his brother's illness and death were fate.

After her husband's death, she visited her brother-in-law's home, where she would spend several nights to lessen her loneliness. She had not spent the night because her brother-in-law was away the last time she had visited.

Darkness came. Dogs occasionally barked in the distance. A few cars and motorcycles passed noisily. The restaurant owner came outside, tossed garbage near the bin, and glanced around before peeing near the garbage bin. She then returned inside and closed the restaurant door.

In bed that night, she tossed and turned, praying that the man she hadn't seen for thirty-six days would be standing at the door when she opened the restaurant the following day.

At midnight, a woman's laugh awakened a man in his sixties. She slept in an adjoining room. Half-awake and half-asleep, the man yawned, lifted his head, and heard his wife talking on the phone. He put his blanket over his head, lay back down, and attempted to sleep, but his wife's noise bothered him. He walked to his bedroom door but hesitated as he was about to open it. He was sure she had locked her bedroom door and would not open it if he knocked.

He returned to bed, faced the adjoining wall, and tried to shout, but nothing emerged from his mouth. He knew it was better to leave her alone. He'd got no response when he had shouted before, which made him angry. He covered his head with a blanket and murmured, "What a crazy old woman!"

The next day, the man got up around noon, walked into the kitchen, looked around, and noticed a half-full pot of thin noodles with bits of beef. He picked up a bowl and a pair of chopsticks from a shelf, moved the stuck-together noodles into the bowl, and sat at a table in the living room. His wife's bowl was on the table, with a single noodle stuck to the side. He again heard his wife on the phone in her bedroom. He ate half of the noodles, left the bowl on the table, went into his bedroom, looked into a mirror on the wall, and combed his short black hair. He shrugged into his leather jacket and walked outside.

Two young men were having lunch in the dumpling restaurant. One looked at the proprietress and whispered, "What an unhappy woman! She never smiles."

The other young man popped a steaming dumpling into his mouth, glanced at her gloomy face, and nodded.

The woman added water into the kettle on the stove and didn't hear, or pretended not to hear, what the young man had said.

The man in the leather jacket peeked into the restaurant and stepped back when he saw the two young men but suddenly changed his mind and entered. He sat silently at a table near the door.

As soon as the woman noticed, she smiled and brought tea. The man realized the two young men were whispering and snickering when she sat at his table. He wanted to say something to the young men but resisted the urge, sipping tea instead.

The woman ignored the young men while happily chatting with the man. One of the young men walked over and gave the woman thirty RMB for their dumplings. She put the cash in her apron pocket, chose a glass from the table near the stove,

poured tea for herself, and rejoined the man.

"Ignore those guys."

"I don't know why locals think I betrayed my wife and am having an affair with you."

"Ignore what others say. They like to spread rumors about everyone, not only us."

"There's nothing wrong with me coming here and talking with you. We enjoy chatting."

"That's right," the woman declared, filled the man's cup, and asked, "Where have you been? I haven't seen you for days."

"I stayed at home and spent time with my daughter. She was on her winter holiday. She returned to school yesterday."

"Where does she study?"

"I forgot the name of her university. It's in the capital city."

"You're lucky. You have a daughter and wife. I have no children, and my husband is gone. When a person lives alone ..." She stopped and put her head down, not finishing.

The man paused and said, "Yeah, but I want to divorce sometimes. My wife's siblings suggested we shouldn't divorce because they would be shamed if their sister in her fifties was divorced. They also think it would destroy my wife and daughter's reputations."

The woman looked at his dark, gaunt face and said nothing.

"I haven't talked to my wife for a year. We eat together only when our daughter is at home. Every child wants their parents to live together. My daughter will be happy if we stay together. She tells her mother and me about one of her girlfriends who was extroverted and talkative but became aloof and socially isolated after her parents divorced."

After his divorce, the proprietress thought she could spend more time with him but realized it would be hard for him with no relatives and few friends in town. She recalled her situation. Locals had generally been accepting and kind and had frequented her restaurant when her husband was alive. After he died, their attitude changed, and she had very few customers. Only her brother-in-law was kind to her.

She recalled her childhood. Her maternal grandmother had cared for her after her parents divorced when she was six. Her grandmother's favorite food was beef dumplings. The little girl helped make dumplings, and her grandmother rewarded her by allowing her to play with her friends afterward. She felt she was different and unlucky and admired her friends with parents who stayed together.

One of her playmates was a mischievous boy with long, messy hair hanging below his shoulders. He often breathed through his nose when snot ran into his mouth. At times, he wiped his nose with the back of his right hand and rubbed it on the legs of his tattered pants.

He asked her, "Where did your father go?"

"He went to town," she answered, her face red.

"Your father hasn't returned home for days. My father goes to town and buys me candy. It only takes a day. What's wrong with your father?"

She put her head down and played with a white stone and a black stone – one in each hand. They were smooth, round, and small.

The next time the boy asked her the same question, she impatiently said, "I told you my father went to town!"

"Liar!" the boy screamed, pushed her so hard that she fell, and ran to his home.

She jumped up and threw the black stone at the boy, but it missed him. Tears dribbled down her cheeks. A playmate wiped her tears away with her hand and consoled her. She stopped crying and slowly walked home, holding the white stone in her right hand.

...

Not knowing what to say, the proprietress offered no suggestions.

They talked till dusk when the man prepared to leave. She urged him to chat more. Although he wanted to, he knew locals would gossip the next day if they talked late. "You know people circulate rumors about others," he said, looking slowly around the restaurant for a few seconds while moving to the door.

She said, "You're the only person I feel close to. We understand each other. Time goes by so quickly when I'm with you."

The man looked at her, smiled, gripped the doorknob, and stepped outside. She stood by the door and said, "I'll open the restaurant early tomorrow morning. I always welcome you. You're my only regular customer."

The man smiled broadly, nodded, and strode vigorously toward his home after saying goodbye.

When she could no longer see him, she went inside.

The proprietress usually could not fall asleep until midnight, but this night was different.

Two hours later, dogs howled in the distance as it began snowing. The wind blew against the windows, making them tremble, but none of this disturbed her. She was deeply asleep and smiling, snuggled under a blanket.

The next day was sunny.

The black and mother dog were peacefully leading the puppies along the street in the evening, amicably walking together. The proprietress stopped looking at the dogs and gazed in the direction of her only regular customer's home.

PART THREE: NEW STORIES

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OBEDIENCE

Black yak-hair tents were pitched on each side of a creek that snaked through endless flat grassland. Yaks, sheep, and horses comfortably grazed along the brook. As a colt galloped to its mother, neighing with its tail in the air, a flock of lambs frolicked near the river. A lazy watchdog sprawled, barking mindlessly at the vigorous lambs. Prayer flags tied to the tops of two poles along a tent's entrance fluttered in a gentle breeze. A seven-year-old barefoot girl with tangled hair emerged from the tent, curious to see why the watchdog was barking. She was short, so people called her Little Girl. She re-entered the tent after glancing at the sleepy dog.

A woman with rough overworked hands took a kettle from the adobe stove in the middle of the tent and poured milk tea into Little Girl's wooden bowl. Little Girl sat by the woman and reported, "Mother, the dog barked at lambs running on the river banks."

"Finish your breakfast quickly and take the calves out to graze," her mother said.

Little Girl nodded picked her bowl up from the ground, sipped some tea, and selected a piece of fried bread from a green plastic basin beside her. Her mother walked outside as Little Girl munched on the bread. After breakfast, Little Girl got ready for the day. She pulled on her leather boots and wrapped herself in a sheepskin robe. Next, she poured milk tea into a battered army-green aluminum container, wrapped the neck with a piece of plastic, and tied it tightly with yak-hair yarn to stop tea from seeping out. She poked two pieces of bread wrapped in plastic in her robe pouch and walked out of the tent.

Her mother had untethered the calves and tied them in pairs with strong short, yak-hair ropes. When Little Girl came near, her mother asked, "Did you bring food?"

Little Girl joyfully responded, "I brought bread and a bottle of milk tea. I'm going to have a splendid lunch today!"

Her mother tossed a piece of dried yak dung at a pair of calves that seemed ready to rush to where their mothers were grazing. The calves bolted when the dung bounced near them and ran to join the other calves.

"Drive those calves to a rich grassland, and don't let them run to their mothers and nurse!" Little Girl's Mother ordered.

Little Girl swung a slingshot over her head and responded, "Yes, Mother. Beat me if a calf nurses its mother today!"

Her mother stood and watched her daughter drive the calves to where neighbor children herded their family's calves.

Little Girl soon squirmed out of her robe and pulled off her shoes, unable to bear the scorching sunshine. She stretched her robe on the ground and lay on it, covering her head with her red sash but periodically checking on the calves to ensure none had joined their mothers far from where she was herding them.

A calf had rushed from the calves the day before and joined the other yaks while Little Girl was napping. Her mother had scolded her when she tried to milk the yak and realized its calf had nursed all the milk. Today, Little Girl vigilantly watched each calf's movement, sure her mother would not forgive her if she made the same mistake again.

At noon, Little Girl unwrapped the plastic and started eating lunch but noticed a pair of calves walking toward the family's other grazing yaks. She left the bread on her robe and ran to the calves in her red leggings and flapping fabric shirt. Once she got near, she picked up stones and hurled them at the two naughty calves, forcing them back to the other calves.

She returned, sprawled on her robe panting as beads of sweat gathered on her broad forehead and flowed down her cheeks onto her robe. After a few minutes, she raised her head plucked some flowers, and stuck them between her toes. She took the aluminum container from under her robe and untied the yak-hair thread. A drop of milk trickled down her chin, leaving a white streak as she gulped milk tea. She belched after drinking and munched some bread.

In the distance, she saw two neighbor children watering their family's calves. They normally herded together. Little Girl decided to offer bread and milk tea to the neighbor boy if he herded calves with her. She took a sip of tea and bit a piece of bread, wondering why Big Head, as everyone called him, wasn't herding calves with her but with a neighbor girl. "Maybe Big Head is attracted to that girl because she has a nice voice and knows many songs. Her mother is a well-known local singer and taught her many songs. Big Head probably enjoys listening," she thought.

Little Girl drove her family's calves back home in the early evening. With her mother, they untied the calves from one another and tethered them to long ropes. Her mother clutched a calf's neck rope and pulled the calf to where other calves were tied. She tied the calf and told her daughter, "Go drive the mother yaks back."

"Yes, Mother," Little Girl replied.

Her empty tea bottle fell on the ground as she untied her sash. She tossed her robe and sash away and rushed to her family's yaks. As she ran, Little Girl could hear the mother yaks grazing near her family yak enclosure and their calves mooing to each other.

In the meantime, Little Girl's mother went into the tent, washing her hands after scooping water from a wooden bucket and pouring it into a basin. She opened

a small, rectangular wooden box divided into three parts by two boards. One part contained a big piece of butter, one dried cheese, and the third roasted barley flour. She took a piece of butter from the big chunk and stuck it onto the upper part of her milking pail. She held the milking bucket in her right hand and a thick black and white yak-hair rope in her left hand and went out.

Little Girl drove the mother yaks into the yak enclosure. Her mother placed the bucket on the ground and tethered the mother yaks. She then hobbled a mother yak with the black and white rope as Little Girl untied a calf.

The calf rushed to its mother and nursed crazily. Little Girl grasped the calf's neck rope when white foam appeared around its mouth and tied it to the tether rope. She stood next to her mother, who sang milking songs while milking.

Little Girl drove the rest of the family's yaks and the horses home at sunset.

Dogs always barked aimlessly when darkness came. In the tent, mother and daughter ate meat soup and *zamba* under the dim light of a flickering butter lamp. A small fire was burning in the stove. The noise of slurping soup broke the silence in the tent. Little Girl considered asking her mother something, but her mother's glum face made her swallow what she was about to say.

Little Girl slept on a dried yak skin beside her mother on one side of the tent. She snuggled into her sheepskin robe and another of her mother's robes. A folded robe covered with her sash was her pillow. Unable to sleep, she counted glistening stars in the blue sky through the hole in the top of their family's tent. Losing interest in the stars, she turned her head to her mother's side, asking, "Mother, are you still awake?"

Her mother covered her head with her robe and responded softly, "Yeah."

Little Girl was glad she could ask the question on her mind. "Can you sing?"

After a pause, her mother said, "Yeah."

"Do you know many songs?"

"No, only a few."

"Is it hard to learn songs?"

Her mother murmured something she couldn't hear.

"What? I didn't hear clearly. Is it hard to learn songs? Can you teach me some songs?"

The mother turned, faced her daughter, and said, "Songs are easy to learn. I'm sleepy. Let me sleep. I'll teach you tomorrow night if you herd the calves well."

Little Girl broke into a big smile and let her mother sleep.

The following day, Little Girl drove her family's calves to the usual place where she often herded her calves. Later, the neighbor girl and boy joined her. The neighbor girl was taller than her peers in their tribe, so locals called her Taller Girl. They herded the calves together and sat next to each other in a field of colorful flowers. Taller Girl picked a marsh marigold, sniffed, handed it to Big Head, and announced, "What a nice smell."

Big Head took it from her plump little hand, sniffed, and said, "You're right. The smell is really nice," and handed it back to Taller Girl, who said, "Keep it. I am giving it to you."

Big Head looked at the flower's petals and handed the flower to Little Girl. As Little Girl was ready to take it from Big Head, Taller Girl grabbed Big Head's hand, exclaiming, "I gave it to you, not ..."

Little Girl plucked a marsh marigold, showed it to Taller Girl, and declared, "I can pick flowers by myself."

Taller Girl squinted at Little Girl, said nothing, looked around, and picked a bunch of marsh marigolds. Big Head grasped Little Girl's hand when she wanted to pick more and said, "Don't pick flowers. You won't grow taller if you pick flowers. Whenever I tried to pick flowers, my grandmother said, 'If you pick flowers, you'll not grow as tall as your father because you kill the flowers when you pick them. A supernatural creature doesn't let you grow taller as punishment for killing the flowers.'"

Taller Girl giggled as Little Girl stopped picking flowers. Taller Girl picked more flowers, held them, and said, "I'm taller than you, so I don't need to worry about growing taller."

Little Girl's only response was to give her flowers to Big Head, who took them, paused a second, and returned them with, "You don't have any flowers, so keep them."

Big Head turned to Taller Girl and said, "We won't compare who has more flowers. We can play another game. Let's sing and see who the best singer is."

Taller Girl had a great voice and knew more songs than Big Head and Little Girl. She grabbed Big Head's arm and said, "Great, let's sing!"

Little Girl tilted her head in disagreement and glanced at Taller Girl's blunt nose, protruding cheeks, and small eyes. She looked at Big Head's round fish eyes below his thick eyebrows and sharp nose. She tried to say something to Big Head, but he didn't give her a chance, announcing, "Taller Girl, you sing first since you know many songs."

Taller Girl smiled, stood, tilted her head to the left, touched her left cheek with her left palm, held her right hand in the air, and sang mesmerizing Big Head and Little Girl.

One of Taller Girl's calves suddenly left the herd of calves and headed toward where the other yaks were grazing. Taller Girl stopped singing and quickly announced, "I have to drive the calf back into the herd of calves. My mother will scold me if it joins my family's yaks," and raced toward the calf.

Big Head stood and ran after her saying, "I'll help you!"

Little Girl watched and pondered, "Why did Big Head help her? Why did he not stay with me? Maybe she sings well, and he likes her."

A few hours later, they drove their calves back home.

At dusk, Little Girl and her mother noticed one of their yaks in Taller Girl's yak enclosure. Taller Girl's tall mother helped them drive the yak out from her family's enclosure. When they finished, Taller Girl's mother told Little Girl, "You and Taller Girl are relatives. You should like each other and never fight when you herd calves together."

Little Girl nodded and ran after her mother, who quickly drove the yak home. They tied it when they got home and walked into their tent.

Little Girl lit a butter lamp on her family's shrine table and recited mantras while her mother added fuel to the stove and put a pot on the stove. Little Girl looked at the pot and asked, "Mother, what's in the pot?"

"Leftover meat soup we cooked last night."

They went to bed after supper.

As usual, Little Girl slept next to her mother. She pulled her robe slightly over her head and said, "Mother, you promised to teach me songs last night. I herded calves well today."

"OK. What song do you want to learn?"

"I don't know any songs. Teach me whatever you know."

"I'll teach you a short song."

She sang two verses to demonstrate, turned to her daughter, and said, "Now, you sing them."

Little Girl cleared her throat and took a deep breath. Hearing her high-pitched voice, she stopped.

"Good, keep singing. You have a nice voice," her mother encouraged.

"Don't lie."

"No! You sing well."

Little Girl started singing hesitantly but soon stopped, confessing, "I forgot the lyrics."

Her mother repeated the lyrics several times and asked her to sing again. Covering her head with her robe, Little Girl tried to sing.

"Don't be silly! There's no reason to be shy with your mother."

Little Girl uncovered her head and said, "It's my first time to sing."

She cleared her throat again and sang the first verse, then stopped declaring she had forgotten the second verse again.

"Stupid! First, you should memorize the lyrics. Otherwise, how can you sing?" chastised her mother.

Her mother repeated the lyrics several times before announcing, "Let's sleep. I'm sleepy. You can practice tomorrow."

Little Girl agreed, and while her mother soon snored beside her, she inaudibly repeated the lyrics.

The next day, the three calf herders were again having lunch together. Little Girl handed her milk tea container to Big Head and said, "Drink milk tea. You said you were thirsty."

Watching her big, dark eyes, Big Head took it from Little Girl and said, "My mother filled my tea container this morning, but I forgot to bring it with me."

As he gulped, tea coursed from his chin to his neck. The girls burst into laughter when he stopped drinking and dried his neck. He returned the tea container to Little Girl and said, "I was so thirsty, I drank half of your tea."

Little Girl drank some of the tea and assured, "I'm not very thirsty, so it's OK."

Taller Girl fumbled in her robe pouch and eventually took out a piece of *zamba* wrapped in a plastic bag. She placed it on her lap and continued groping in her robe pouch but found nothing. "I also forgot to bring my cup with me. May I drink a bit of your tea?"

Looking at Big Head, who was munching on a piece of baked bread, Little Girl said, "There's only enough tea for two."

Big Head picked up the tea container from the ground near Little Girl, handed it to Taller Girl, and exclaimed, "I'm not going to drink more. You two drink it!"

Taller Girl drank, then asked, "Who wants to eat *zamba*? I'll give you a piece."

Big Head declined.

Little Girl shook her head and took a bite of her bun.

Glancing at their calves, Taller Girl said, "Our calves are busy grazing, so we can play now. I sang yesterday. You two didn't. Now it's your turn."

Big Head and Little Girl looked at each other and smiled. Little Girl stuck out her tongue and said, "You sing first."

Big Head said, "You sing first, then I'll sing."

Little Girl put her head down, looked at the bun she held, and cleared her throat each time her herding mates encouraged her to start. Sweat gathered on her forehead and nose. Big Head encouraged, "Don't be shy. You must have a voice as nice as your mother's."

Little Girl replied without looking at Big Head, "I don't know any songs."

Taller Girl said, "You told me this morning your mother taught you a song last night."

Big Head said, "Sing the song you learned last night!"

Little Girl raised her head, smiled, and confided, "I forgot the lyrics."

Big Head encouraged, "Well, just sing the part you remember."

Taller Girl checked in each direction, "Don't be reluctant. Nobody's watching."

Although trembling, Little Girl took a long breath and started singing. After the first verse, Taller Girl heartily laughed. Little Girl immediately stopped and covered her head with her hands. Big Head touched Little Girl's head, saying, "Keep singing. You have a lovely voice!"

"No, I'm not going to sing. Taller Girl was laughing," protested Little Girl.

Taller Girl said, "I wasn't laughing at you. You sing well."

Little Girl lifted her head a few seconds later, looked at Big Head, and announced, "It's your turn."

Big Head put the piece of baked bread on his lap into his robe pouch. Looking at the girls, he smiled, stood, and ran. Taller Girl's piece of round *zamba* rolled onto the ground from her lap as she stood and chased Big Head. Little Girl watched, sure she would catch him and bring him back. Taller Girl grabbed his robe, causing him to fall. Big Head sprawled on the ground, looked at Taller Girl, and gestured for her to sit beside him.

Meanwhile, Little Girl finished eating the bun and drank the rest of her tea. She was still feeling very shy but grudgingly joined them.

That night, Little Girl and her mother sat near the stove with the only light in the tent provided by light from the stove.

"Let's go to bed. I have already taught you all the verses."

Little Girl leaned against her mother and pleaded, "Let me practice again. I'm stupid and will forget the lyrics and melody."

"Practice tomorrow while herding the calves."

"Our neighbor boy said I have a good voice. I should learn more songs."

Little Girl's mother stood and said, "It's enough for you to know one song since you're not going to be a public singer. Singing doesn't make you a good girl."

"What makes me a good girl?"

"A good girl herds calves and yaks well, is filial, obeys her parents in everything, respects elders, and doesn't gossip about others."

The two went out to pee and returned to their sleeping space. Little Girl, wrapped in her warm robes, began reciting song lyrics. Disturbed by her daughter's recitations, her mother demanded, "Let me sleep! Chant scriptures rather than recite lyrics."

"Yes, Mother."

"Chant *Drolma* mantras. You'll give birth to sons if you chant many *Drolma* mantras."

"OK," Little Girl said, chanting a *Drolma* mantra until she slept.

Big Head and Little Girl were again herding calves a few days later. Little Girl put her head down and sang:

Black yaks are the dew on grass tops of the mountain peaks
The yak herder is the cosmic sun

Big Head stared at her, intoxicated by her pleasant song.

Little Girl stopped, "Oh, I can't remember the lyrics. Let me think," and continued a bit later:

Yearlings are the glittering stars in the sky
The shepherd is the milky full moon
Horses are the colorful flowers on the bank of the lake

Little Girl looked at Big Head as she finished singing. He smiled and complimented, "You sing well. Can you sing it again?"

She smiled and said, "I can sing it tomorrow."

Big Head insisted, "But I want to listen to it now. I enjoy your singing."

Coughing, Little Girl replied, "I can't. My throat is uncomfortable. I can sing it for you tomorrow."

Big Head looked into Little Girl's eyes and asked, "Promise?"

She nodded. Big Head smiled, thought a second, and said, "Tomorrow, my family will move to our autumn pasture."

Little Girl added, "My family will move to my family's pasture the day after tomorrow."

Big Head said sadly, "We can't see each other until our families move to our winter pasture. You can learn and sing more songs to me next time we meet."

She modestly replied, "I'm stupid and probably can't learn many songs. My mother taught me the song I just sang for many days. I easily forgot the lyrics, and my mother said I was stupid."

Big Head suddenly stood up, ran from Little Girl, and turned to look back to see if Little Girl was coming to attack him as he peed. There she was, rushing toward him, and soon she succeeded in playfully throwing him to the ground.

A month later, Little Girl's family arrived at her family's autumn pasture. Her mother told her to enter as she stood at the tent entrance. Little Girl came inside and asked, "Mother, what's packed on that horse?"

"Our neighbor's grandmother passed away. It's her corpse."

Little Girl had never seen a corpse and peeked through her family's tent door. She saw a man riding a horse and leading a packed horse behind him. She could see the pack horse carrying something wrapped in white cloth.

Her mother was chanting scriptures and holding a string of beads in her hand but then she paused and said, "Don't look at it."

Little Girl reluctantly walked to her mother, sitting near the stove.

"Don't sing at home or in the mountains. Our neighbors are mourning, and we should consider their feelings."

Little Girl nodded and sat by mother, who added, "Death is unpredictable. Chant as many scriptures as possible before you die. If you don't chant scriptures, you'll walk in thick darkness after you die and be lost in the darkness. Chanting many scriptures, will lighten the darkness."

Little Girl was frightened, immediately chanted mantras, and then said, "I don't have prayer beads. I need a string of beads."

"You don't need a string of prayer beads. You're a child."

"I need them," she insisted, interrupting her mother's chanting and grabbing a string of her prayer beads.

Little Girl chanted mantras the next day while holding a string of prayer beads and herding her family's yaks on a small hill. She assumed light would guide her soul in the darkness after she died. At night, she reported to her mother that she had recited mantras all day, earning her mother's praise and encouraging her to persist.

Little Girl sobbed one night after her mother scolded her for leaving her family's yaks on the mountain. She dried her eyes with the back of her hand as her mother put several pieces of dried yak dung into the scoop. Piously chanting mantras while blowing over the yak dung in the scoop, she pulled a tent rope through the upper part of the tent, secured it to the tent fabric, and put the scoop handle between the rope and the tent cloth, so the scoop was covered by tent cloth at the tent top.

Little Girl looked at the scoop and asked, "Mother, why did you do that?"

Without looking at her, her mother answered, "Put yak dung representing yaks in a scoop, chant scripture, and blow over the dung if you leave yaks on the mountains at night. Wolves and thieves won't see the yaks left on the mountain once tent cloth covers the dung in the scoop."

Little Girl looked at her mother, "Next time, I'll not leave any yaks on the mountains."

...

Winter came. The tribal families all moved to their winter pastures. Little Girl was unhappy Big Head's family didn't return to the winter pasture because they had herded yaks together since their families began sharing the winter pasture. Little Girl now herded her family's yaks on the mountains alone, pulled the upper part of her robe over her head, and slept each time she was bored while herding. She did not chant scriptures or sing. Wolves attacked her family's yaks and killed one while she was napping one afternoon. Her mother scolded and beat her when she reported what had happened. From that day on, Little Girl dared not nap, and wolves killed no more yaks. Her neighbors commented she would be a great yak herder like her mother, her mother was proud of her, and Little Girl was proud of herself for being a good herder.

Big Head's family eventually returned to the winter pasture, and Little Girl and Big Head herded together again. While sitting on a mountaintop as yaks grazed below them, Little Girl asked, "Why did your family only return to winter pasture yesterday?"

"My family moved to my older sister's land a month after we moved to the autumn pasture."

"Why did your family move there?"

"My sister's mother-in-law got sick when my sister was six months pregnant. Sister's husband took his mother to the hospital, so Sister needed my family's help. Father herded both families' yaks, and Mother helped Sister do house chores."

Big Head looked toward the mountain ranges topped with clouds above and meandering rivers below and gazed at the yaks peacefully grazing on rich grass. "I have not heard you sing for months. You sing very well. Please sing the song you sang last time we were together."

Little Girl uncomfortable put her head down and murmured, "I can't. I forgot the song's lyrics and melody."

"How's it possible to forget the song in a few months? You're lying!"

"I forgot. I haven't sung for months."

"You have a nice voice and sang that song well. Ask your mother, and she'll teach you."

Little Girl nodded.

Little Girl's mother handed her brother a bowl of milk tea and offered him a plate of boiled meat and a knife a bit later. She poured herself tea and took a piece of meat from a basin beside her.

Turning to him, she said, "Your daughter is young and can remarry, so don't worry about her marriage. She's nice. A good man will marry her."

After chewing a piece of meat, her brother replied, "It's all my fault. I thought her ex-husband was a good man and told her to marry him."

"It's OK. Don't worry. Your family is rich, and many good men want to marry your daughter. No good man will marry my daughter since my family is not rich."

"It's too early to think about your daughter's marriage. She's a little girl."

"She's different with no father to find her a good spouse."

"My friend is a very good man. His family is not rich, but he has two sons. Both are good boys and about Little Girl's age. It's possible to arrange a marriage between Little Girl and one of his sons."

"Great! Now I won't worry much about her marriage."

They continued chatting until he left shortly after the meal.

Little Girl and her mother went to bed after supper. Little Girl hesitated, "Mother, I forgot the song you taught me. Please teach me again."

"Let me sleep. I'll teach you later."

"Teach me tonight."

"Why do you want to learn it tonight?"

"I promised Big Head I'd sing it to him tomorrow. He said I have a nice voice and wants to hear that song again."

"You are troublesome. Let me sleep!" her mother scolded, but she was pleased and taught her the song again anyway.

Little Girl learned it quickly, impressing her mother. Little Girl was so happy imagining Big Head enjoying her song the following day that sleep did not come until midnight.

41

THE GRAY GRASS



zigzagging brook flowed through a big valley shrouded in the morning fog. Black yak-hair and canvas tents were pitched along the banks of a creek. Herdswomen, their heads wrapped in red scarves, milked yaks and collected fresh dung in their family's yak enclosures. Yaks and horses loomed through the thick fog, grazing near the tents and each side of the creek. Dogs barked when a boy, Don grub, sang as he drove his family's yaks from a hill toward his family tent.

Inside a small canvas tent pitched next to a black yak-hair tent, forty-three-year-old Dudul raised his upper body from his bed and lit a cigarette with a cheap lighter. Once it was lit and glowing, he inhaled deeply while gazing at the lower part of the tent flapping in a gentle breeze. Motionless, he was entirely engrossed in thought.

"That boy would be alive if I hadn't visited my cousin on the way to the township town. I was a little bit late! I couldn't save his life. Why did he end his life that way? Stupid! Jumping off the Yellow River Bridge! I should have shouted and stopped him from doing such a fucking stupid thing. I didn't get near enough to grab him. I'm sure he could hear me clearly if I had shouted at the end of the bridge as he jumped from the middle. Why didn't I shout at him? I'm fucking dumb. How pathetic. Nothing is more precious than life."

He stubbed out the butt of his exhausted cigarette once it burned his fingers, listlessly remaining in bed, staring through the tent door. Sadness and depression registered on his round, deeply tanned face. But then he stood, pulled on his robe, and squirmed into his shoes, thinking, "I'll never have another chance to save a human life that can atone for the sin of killing a person."

He sighed as he exited the tent and walked toward the black yak-hair tent where his twelve-year-old son, Dondrub, joined his parents for breakfast after driving the family's yaks to a small valley. Lhamo, three years younger than her husband, Dudul, glanced at him as he sat beside their boy. She read the sadness in his gaunt face and said, "Don't wear a face of misery. Our son and I want to see your happy face every morning!"

A faint smile crept onto Dudul's face as Dondrub smiled at him. Looking at his son's reddish cheeks, he was reminded of a friend who had often visited his family

* Gu ru 'phrin las. 2023. The Gray Grass. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:354-369.

with his friends, chatting cheerfully for hours. Dudul thought, "I was cheerful and humorous before imprisonment. People liked to visit my family and chat. I've been withdrawn and unhappy since returning from prison. Maybe that's why my family has few visitors."

Lhamo looked at Dudul's tangled, dirty shoulder-length hair and said, "You haven't washed your face and hair for weeks. Why don't you wash your hair to refresh yourself."

Dudul sipped his tea and murmured, "I'll wash my hair after breakfast," without looking at Lhamo.

"Seems you didn't sleep well last night again."

"I dreamed of the boy. Why did he end his life that way?"

"He lived with his uncle's family and herded their yaks after his mother died. His uncle beat him every time wolves killed a yak."

"Young people lack the courage to face life," Dudul said and, looking at his son, added, "Be kind to others. Cruelty ruins your life and leads to regret."

...

Dudul lit a butter lamp on a small wooden table in front of aligned religious figures, reciting mantras, intoning, "All living beings can avoid suffering and enjoy happiness." He'd learned this from his mother. She had often asked him to light butter lamps every morning and night after his father, a famous hunter, had died from a heart attack. His father killed and butchered deer and brought the meat home to feed his family. He also trapped wolves and foxes and sold the skins to buy food and clothes for his family. His mother believed lighting butter lamps could reduce her dead husband's sin and beat her son once she discovered he forgot to light butter lamps in the morning. His mother died when he turned fifteen, eight years after his father's death.

Dudul sat cross-legged, chanting scriptures and spinning a prayer wheel next to his son, who was stretched out on a mat writing homework. He was in grade four and concerned his Tibetan teacher would beat him if he didn't finish his homework before he returned to school after the summer vacation. He remembered that his teacher beat a student who didn't finish his Tibetan assignment for the last winter vacation. The teacher asked four male students to grab the student, and then he beat his butt with a wooden stool leg. The student couldn't sit the following day.

Lhamo was fixing lunch, tossing pieces of yak meat into a pot on the stove. Smoke and an acrid smell wafted out of the pot as the meat fried in the hot oil, causing Lhamo to cough. Dondrub raised his head, glancing from his notebook to the pot. Looking at him, his mother said, "Quickly finish your homework. Lunch is about ready."

Dondrub swallowed and declared, "I can't write an essay."

"What's the topic?" his mother asked.

"The love between father and son."

His mother stirred the meat, added potato chunks, and suggested, "If I were you, I could write that essay in a few minutes."

As Dondrub snickered, Dudul stared at his son and thought, "It's hard for him to write such an essay. He didn't get much love from me. I was imprisoned when he was four and released only a year ago. He spent most of his time at school in the year I was back from prison."

He asked his son, "Is writing about you and your mother's love, OK?"

A big smile spread across Don grub's face. "Yeah, good idea. The teacher said to write about parents and their children's love," and he rushed out of the tent to pee just as his mother asked, "Do you want rice?"

A few minutes later, he raced into the tent, sat beside his mother, and said, "No rice for me."

His oily, crumpled books and notebooks were scattered beside a mat on the ground.

...

Normally, Dondrub drove the family's yaks back home, but since his son was busy writing his homework, Dudul walked toward his family's yaks at the bottom of the valley. Dudul's cousin, Nyima, and a neighbor were riding yaks toward their families' yaks in an adjoining valley. When they saw Dudul, the neighbor commented, "How compassionate! I rarely see him riding yaks and horses to herd. By walking, he's accumulating merit and mitigating his sins."

Nyima returned, "No, he's worried his family's riding yaks will die if he rides them."

"No need for concern since his family is the richest in our community. He's got many riding yaks."

"His family and mine have the same number of yaks. My family has more horses than his."

The neighbor nodded not wanting to argue with Nyima. The neighbor annoyed Nyima each time they debated which family was the richest in their community.

They sang and chatted as they disappeared into the valley.

...

Dudul tossed and turned in bed. Lhamo turned on a flashlight when he started heavily sweating and looked at her wristwatch. It was three AM. She looked at her husband and noticed beads of sweat coursing down his cheeks. She wiped the precipitation from his head with her palm and said, "You need to see a doctor. Each time I tell you to see a doctor, you said, 'I'm fine. Don't need to see a doctor.'"

Dudul took a long breath and turned over to avoid the light in his eyes. Turning off the flashlight, his wife slid it under her pillow and asked, "Dreamed about the boy again?"

"Not this time. Dreamed of the person I ..." his words petered out.

Dondrub drove his family's yaks to a mountain after breakfast and promised to herd them the whole day without coming home for lunch. Pouring lukewarm water into a basin, Lhamo set it next to Dudul, handed him a towel, looked at his dirty, oily hair, and ordered, "Wash your hair. I asked you to wash your hair yesterday, but you didn't. I'll ask Nyima to help you see a doctor."

Dudul threw the towel into the basin and said, "Don't bother him. He needs to herd his family's yaks."

Lhamo left the tent without replying, but before he had finished washing his hair and face, she returned with Nyima who lived only a few minutes away. Lhamo offered Nyima a bowl of tea. In the meantime, Dudul combed his hair and struggled with the tangles between the comb's teeth due to not washing his hair for weeks. Sipping tea, Nyima looked at Dudul, commenting, "You're thinner. Not sleeping well at night and appetite loss must be from a serious illness. Lhamo is right. You must see a doctor."

Lhamo brought a clean robe and shirt from the canvas tent, handed them to Dudul, and said, "Put these on. Your robe and shirt are dirty."

Dudul plopped the clothes on a mat and asked, "Where's the motorcycle key?"

Lhamo said, "It must be under our pillow," and left the tent.

Dudul followed her without putting on the clean robe and shirt. Nyima came out after him. The motorcycle was parked near the black yak-hair tent's entrance. Nyima asked, "Who's going to drive?"

"You do it. You drive better than me."

Lhamo handed the key to Nyima, who started the motorcycle. Dudul got behind him as Lhamo stared at her husband, "What a strange man! Likes to wear dirty clothes."

Dudul said nothing as they drove away.

Dudul sat listlessly near the window in the doctor's office, staring at a mother holding her three or four-year-old son on her lap near the stove in the middle of the office. Tears trickled down his cheeks as the little boy cried from headache pain caused by a high fever. Then Dudul refocused on the doctor and Nyima chatting outside.

Nyima described the situation, "He's ill-tempered, has no appetite, has nightmares, and can't sleep well at night. He didn't have...." He paused, embarrassed to report what Lhamo had told him on the way from his home to Dudul's home a short time ago. But finally, he said, "His wife told me that his sexual desire is decreasing. No sex for days."

The doctor nodded, seemingly knowing exactly what medicine would cure his illness. They then entered the medicine storeroom next to the doctor's office and took some boxes of pills. Returning to the office, the doctor gave the boxes of pills to Dudul and explained the prescription. The doctor took the money from Dudul, reassuring him, "Don't worry. Take those pills and try to feel better when you are unhappy."

Dudul and his cousin thanked the doctor and left.

On the way home, they stopped to sit near a small river. As Nyima untied his sash, bottles of Cola tumbled out, rolling on the ground. He spread his robe on the ground, took off his shoes, and sprawled out. He opened a bottle of Cola, slugged half of it down, belched, and then threw the bottle to Dudul, who was also lying on the ground. Dudul raised his upper body and opened the bottle. Fluid spurted out and trickled from the bottle, over his hand and onto the ground. Wiping the liquid from his hand on his robe, he sipped Cola before lighting a cigarette. He inhaled heavily without exhaling smoke from his nose. Later, having washed his feet in the river, Nyima covered his neck with his scarf declaring, "What a hot day! The sun scorched my neck."

Inhaling the fragrance of the various, colorful flowers as a breeze wafted toward him, Dudul took another sip of Cola, agreeing, "The weather's very hot. No rain for days."

Nyima picked up a blade of green grass, "Scary! It has turned red in some places where the grass is exposed to intense sunshine."

"Right. Was that boy wearing sunglasses we met near the clinic yard gate Dodo's son?"

"Yeah."

Dudul sighed and said, "Miserable boy! I feel sorry for him. I don't know how I can help him."

Startled, Nyima stared at Dudul with wide-open eyes, "If you're compassionate, you shouldn't have killed his father."

Dudul said, "Destiny determines everything," as they continued their trip.

Dudul ate a bowl of rice with beef and cabbage for supper while his son had four bowls. Their bowls were the same size. When Lhamo urged him to have more, he said, "I'm full."

She worried he would continue to lose weight and become more ill. He then took two pills and went to bed. The couple slept in the canvas tent where they could easily protect their family's calves from wolf attack. Dondrub slept in the black yak-hair tent.

Lhamo got in bed with her husband, turned off her flashlight, slid it under their pillow, and put her head on it. Dudul turned to her and confided, "I saw Dodo's son wearing a discolored, worn robe and a pair of sunglasses. He was with his friends and didn't see me. Should I find a way to help him? His family's poor."

Lhamo asked in surprise, "What? Aren't you afraid he'll avenge his father's death?"

"He's living with his grandmother. His parents divorced, and his father decided to raise his only child. Later, the boy lost his father."

"Others will think you are afraid of your enemies if you help him and his grandmother. It'll hurt your reputation as well as our son's."

Dudul didn't know how to respond and said nothing. Lhamo put a leg on his legs and moved beside him, stroking his chest and kissing his cheek and lips. She stopped and turned away when Dudul showed no interest.

He dozed off after two hours of troubled thoughts and dreamed of Dodo: After bearded, fat Dodo, smashed his fist into his face, Dudul tasted blood as it gushed from his nose. Groping in his robe pouch, Dudul pulled out a knife, unsheathed it and gripped it just as Dodo jumped on top of him, sending him sprawling to the ground. In the process, Dodo landed on the upright knife, sending it deep into Dodo's belly. Dodo's progressively weaker attempts to stand continued as blood puddled around him. Dudul sheathed his bloody knife, fled, and was walking across a bridge when a boy wearing sunglasses stopped him, aimed a pistol at him, and fired.

Dudul woke in terror and turned to his snoring wife but didn't wake her. He couldn't sleep for hours.

...

Lhamo washed her hair in a stream near their family's tent as Dudul put his son's outgrown clothes in a bag and added a plastic bag with pieces of dried yak meat to a sack half-full of rice. He slung the sack over one shoulder and walked toward his impoverished neighbor family, which included a seven-year-old boy, a nine-year-old girl, and his wife.

Lhamo later scolded, "Giving old clothes would make her unhappy. Poor people don't wear others' old clothes today."

"She was happy and thanked me."

He remembered what his mother had said and repeated, "The best way to accumulate merit is feeding, clothing, and housing poor people and making them happy."

...

Dudul had given his poor neighbor the last of his family's rice, so he left home to buy food for his family the following day. He refused to put on the clean robe and shirt Lhamo suggested before leaving. He slowed the motorcycle when he noticed a small white tent pitched near the road. Upon hearing the motorcycle, a monk emerged from the tent and sat cross-legged on the ground. Dudul parked his motorcycle on the roadside, got off, and sat beside the monk who wore a string of big sandalwood prayer beads around his neck. He placed his hands in his lap and continued piously chanting, ignoring Dudul, who guessed the monk was a great tantric practitioner as he wore a dirty, tattered cassock, had long, dirty hair haphazardly wrapped around his head, and had an unkempt mustache under his big blunt nose.

When Dudul knelt, the monk opened his big eyes, looked at Dudul, and said, "Poor living beings. Every living being in the universe suffers."

Dudul put his palms together, held them to his chest, bowed to the monk, thinking, "How true!" and motionlessly waited to hear more.

Lhamo offered a bowl of tea to Nyima, who had come to inquire about Dudul's health.

"The weather's extremely hot, so you must be thirsty. Drink some tea," encouraged Lhamo.

Nyima gazed into her beautiful eyes, "I'm not thirsty," hesitated and added, "Are you thirsty?"

"I had a bowl of tea just before you came."

"I can quench your thirst if you're thirsty."

Lhamo giggled, went outside, looked around the tent, didn't see anyone nearby, and reentered the tent.

A small bald man with small eyes played pool in a glass-enclosed room with his tall friend. The bald man lit a cigarette, looked outside, and noticed a short man with a sack of rice on his back that seemed so heavy it would push his head to the ground. Realizing it was Dudul, he commented, "Man-killer! Killing a person is the most sinful thing."

His friend looked and said, "He didn't deliberately kill his friend. They were both drunk. Dudul called Dodo 'Big Nose,' so Dodo punched and fell on him, sending the knife Dudul held into his gut."

This made him recall teasing Dodo, calling him Big Nose among their friends. That irritated Dodo, who thought he was the best-looking local man. He hated being called Big Nose.

The bald man said, "It doesn't matter if he killed his friend accidentally. What matters is he killed his friend. That's sinful."

"He felt guilty and regretted killing his friend."

"I broke many girls' hearts when I broke up with them. Later, I felt guilty and regretted breaking their hearts. But feeling guilty and regretting what I had done didn't make any difference. Those girls were still in great pain."

His friend broke into laughter and said, "Don't boast. I know you had one girlfriend who later became your wife."

The bald man felt uncomfortable, smiled, and continued the game of pool.

Dudul's face showed great sadness, and it seemed his illness worsened daily. When Lhamo asked what was bothering him, he took two pills and replied, "I'm fine," and went to bed without supper. His unhappiness made his wife and son unhappy. They also lacked the appetite to have dinner.

Dudul dreamed he was naked and lying on a stone altar, his head hanging over the side, facing the ground. Several monks and his relatives, including his cousin, stood and chanted scriptures a few meters from the altar. A monk holding a big axe stood near the altar. Vultures hovered in the blue sky, and some flew down near the people. They chased one another, flapping and stretching their wings, craning their necks, and looking over the altar. The monk raised the axe as the other monks

AHP #65 ལྷོག་ལམ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལམ། Gu ru 'phrin las
chanted and blew conch shells. Dudul woke with sweat when the monk hit his back
with the axe.

...

Nyima went to see a monk in the local monastery Lhamo had asked him to consult about her husband's situation. Nyima sat beside the adobe house entrance to await the monk's return from teaching. An hour later, an old white-haired monk came. They entered the room and sat on dry yak skins near the stove. Nyima told the monk about Dudul. The monk chanted a mantra and blew over a sifter he held in his palm, then touched it to his forehead and closed his eyes. He placed the sifter on his lap, read the number, and said, "No big problem. Evils do not possess him. He's unhappy and depressed because he's paying the price for his actions."

Dudul's family and Nyima were glad that Dudul wasn't tortured by ghosts.

...

It was September. Dondrub returned to school, and his mother herded their family's yaks. Dudul rested in the shade of his family's tent near the entrance, reciting scripture and spinning a prayer wheel. He looked at the high mountains. Suddenly, the grass on the mountain turned from gray to green. His heart pounded at that sudden transition. He put down his prayer wheel and rubbed his eyes. He blinked several times, opening his eyes wide to look at the mountains, and realized the grass was indeed green. Feeling calmer after his fantasy, he was confused to discover the prayer wheel on the ground. "How did I throw it on the ground?" he wondered and later imagined how it happened.

...

Dudul saw Nyima's wife, Tsomo, walk toward his family as his family's watchdog barked. He invited Tsomo into the tent and offered tea. She was tortured by a falling out with Nyima, suspecting he was having sex with Lhamo. She didn't tell Dudul who Nyima was seeing, but he knew. She sobbed, and tears trickled down her cheeks like raindrops. Dudul consoled, "Forget it. Be a tolerant wife."

"I love him so much. I can't allow him to love another woman," she protested.

"I'm sure he loves you too. Forget it."

"You know I can't have children. Nyima wants to marry his lover and have children."

"Don't think too much. Forgive him if you don't want to divorce him. Forgiving him will mend the conflict."

Dudul took a deep breath to calm himself. When Nyima had visited him in prison, he had asked Nyima to care for Lhamo and Don grub. He was sure Nyima was caring for his wife as he asked, which had built a relationship between Nyima and Lhamo. He added, "It's not your fault. It's not Nyima's fault. It's my fault. I messed up everything."

Tsomo didn't pay much attention and continued sobbing, eventually returning home with a swollen face and hoarse voice.

Jalu, in his early sixties, was the poorest, laziest man in their village. His wife and daughter were also lazy. He visited Dudul and spent the night at his home. Jalu often rested at home and would say, "My life is predoomed to be poor. No matter how hard I work, I can't become rich since the fortuneteller predicted my life." His relatives and neighbors frequently urged and encouraged him to herd his family's yaks well after wolves killed some of his family's yaks.

Jalu repeatedly told Dudul, "You're the best man I know. You often help my family. We are grateful. I'll never forget your kindness."

Dudul loaned money to Jalu when his son or daughter got sick and needed medicine and sometimes gave money to Jalu to purchase food and clothes for his family.

As they chatted, Dudul looked at Jalu's faded robe and shirt and encouraged him to drink more tea. Dudul recalled Jalu's story:

When I was younger, a fortuneteller came to my place and predicted I would be poor because he saw only a few barley grains in the bottom of a leather bag when he divined for me.

Dudul was scared when he thought about the fortuneteller. He interjected and asked, "When will grass turn green to gray?"

"Late September, early October," replied Jalu.

Suddenly, Dudul began thinking about the fortuneteller and what he had said to him. Jalu continued talking, but when he asked a question, Dudul was so disengaged Jalu had to repeat his question.

On Saturday, locals came to town to pick up their children from the local boarding school and take them home for the weekend. As Dudul and his son walked near the police station, they saw a crowd gathered at the police station entrance, where two policemen were escorting a man with long hair and shackled hands inside. A young policeman holding a monk's cassock and a yellow bag followed them. No one from the crowd knew the detainee and assumed he was an outsider. As the crowd speculated on the man's crime, Dudul craned his neck, clearly seeing the man's face as he entered the yard. Dudul thought, "He resembles the tantric practitioner I met a few weeks ago!" but then told himself, "Impossible!"

Suddenly, a teenage boy wearing sunglasses spat in Dudul's face and grasped the handle of a long knife inside his sash. It took a second for Dudul to recognize it was Dodo's son. Dudul grabbed his son's hand, and they walked quickly away. The boy spat at them and snarled, "Fucker!" as his friends seized him and urged him not to throw a rock at Dudul.

...

The police leader slumped into an armchair next to a policewoman sitting at a table, taking notes on what the accused was saying. The police leader said, "You told a couple with three daughters to give you a yak, and you would help them have a son. Is that true?"

The man thought and replied, "I could chant scripture and help them have a child. That's what I said. I didn't say the child would be a son or daughter."

The policeman shouted, "Liar! You may cheat others, but that doesn't mean you're smart enough to deceive me. They gave you a yak because you promised the wife would give birth to a son. Right? But then she gave birth to another daughter. Not a son."

"I told them the wife would give birth to a child. I didn't promise they would have a son."

"Where's the yak you took from them?"

"I sold it."

The policeman hit the table with his fist, stood up, and said, "Fake monk. Shame on you."

"I'm not a fake monk. I'm a real monk."

"Why aren't you wearing your monk robe if you're a real monk?"

"When I tried to jump across a stream this morning, I fell in the water, and my clothes got wet. I was cold and went to a home. The family didn't have monk robes, so the man of the family gave me some of his clothes, and I put them on. "

The policeman chuckled and said, "Don't play smart with me! Tell the truth. It's good for you."

The man said, "I dare not lie to anyone. If I lie to you, it means I violated my religious vow. Breaking a religious vow is an unattonable sin."

The policeman and his colleague shook their heads in disbelief.

...

When Dudul was about to go to bed without dinner, Dondrub looked at his father's gaunt face, clutched his leg, and begged him to eat. Dudul sat back on the ground. Dondrub knelt, embraced him, and kissed his cheek. Dudul patted his son's head, kissing his forehead as his son smiled.

Lhamo sat beside her husband, looked at him a bit later, and accused, "Coward! You should have beaten him. I will fight back if a man spits in my face. How shameful! He spat in your face and called you 'bastard,' and you walked away. Others say you were afraid of him."

Dudul silently thought, "Of course, he hates me and wants to kill me. If someone killed my father, I would try to kill them. I must endure whatever the boy does to me. I won't hurt him and bring more suffering to his grandmother."

But then he thought, "Maybe Lhamo is right. Maybe I should beat him and teach him a lesson, or he'll think I'm afraid of him. People bully you when you do

nothing. No, no! I won't make another mistake. I won't hurt that boy and his grandmother again."

After a bowl of noodles for dinner, he kissed his son's forehead and asked him to go to bed.

...

The snow-clad village in October was a time and place when distant birds were the only living beings making noise. Dudul motionlessly stood near the tent entrance, gazing at the snowcapped mountains. A shudder of fear passed through him as he thought, "Death is coming for me."

While Lhamo was outside milking yaks, he entered the canvas tent, stood on a small stool, and hung a rope with a noose from a roof pole.

Dondrub told his mother about a teacher beating a student with a stick because he hadn't finished his homework. Unable to bear the pain, the boy had run from one classroom corner to another. His son's joyful laughter reminded him of his childhood and how much he had admired neighbors' children who happily sat on horses behind their fathers. Recalling that children with parents are the happiest and luckiest, Dudul removed the noose from his neck.

Bright sunshine melted the snow in an hour. The green grass was now gray.

After escorting Dondrub to school, Dudul headed home. A man hailed him on the Yellow River Bridge for a ride. At first, Dudul didn't recognize him but soon realized it was the man he had met two months earlier. The man's hair was now short and he wore a black fabric robe. Disembarking from his motorcycle Dudul unsheathed his knife as the man approached and then he stabbed the man in the belly. The man's face turned pale as blood spurted out of his mouth. Dudul stabbed him several times until he toppled to the ground as blood pooled on the bridge. Dudul spat in the man's face declaring, "You are now dying when the grass is gray."

Two police cars and an ambulance screamed toward the bridge with shrieking sirens, shocking everyone. People scrambled out of restaurants and shops, gathering in the town center, talking to one another, wondering what had happened.

Dudul leaned against a bridge barrier holding his knife, blood slowly dripping from the crimson blade. Bystanders stood near the bleeding man, but no one dared approach Dudul.

Having arrived quickly, the police chief got out of his car and pointed his pistol at Dudul, who flung his knife into the river. Some policemen helped two doctors carry the pale-faced victim to the ambulance. Dudul confessed, "I stabbed him," and didn't resist as a policeman cuffed his wrists.

The next day, Lhamo and Nyima were in the police station yard with the police chief, who explained, "The victim was a fake monk. He met your husband two months ago and told him, 'You will die when the grass turns gray.' Your husband believed that and was very depressed as a result. You know how miserable Dudul has been recently."

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Better understanding what Dudul had suffered, Lhamo's gaze shifted from the police chief to the mountains encircling the town. Her eyes filled with tears as she realized the grass had turned completely gray.

PART FOUR: ARTICLE

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"YAK HERDERS ARE THE COSMIC SUN": A MGO LOG HERDSWOMAN'S SINGING LIFE (2022)

ABSTRACT

This text describes the singing life of Phur 'tsho (b. 1960), a herder born in the contemporary Khang sar (Kangsai) Town, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Phur 'tsho learned songs from her mother, friends, and the radio. She sang while herding calves and yaks with her herdmates. She moved to a new home in Smin thang (Mentang) Township after her mother and maternal uncle arranged her marriage in 1976.

KEYWORDS

Tibetan women singing, Himalayan pastoral songs, Mgo log yak-hair tent, Qinghai herdswomen songs

Mountaintops shrouded in clouds pierced the sky on the horizon. An eagle searching for food soared above yaks, horses, and sheep, calmly grazing on the banks of a creek that twisted and turned through the grassland like a dragon.

Three riders on two yaks passed by a thawing lake. Phur 'tsho sat behind her mother on a polled, black yak. Phur 'tsho's aunt rode a brown yak. Phur 'tsho tapped her mother's back from the discomfort caused by sitting on the yak's spine. Phur 'tsho's mother ignored her and began singing as they rode by grazing yaks that looked up in surprise, their ears twitching, grass stems hanging from their mouths, and watching and listening, mesmerized by a piercingly sharp melody that seemed to reach the ends of the earth and somehow, for a short time, seemed to answer all the problems any sentient creature was capable of having.

Phur 'tsho forgot her discomfort and wrapped her arms around her mother. She leaned her head against her mother's back and announced, "Mom! I want to be a singer just like you!" when the song ended.

Her aunt smiled and looked at Phur 'tsho, who smiled back.

* Gu ru 'phrin las. 2023. "Yak Herders are the Cosmic Sun." A Mgo log Herdsman's Singing Life (2022). *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:257-264.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD LIFE

Phur 'tsho (b. 1964) was born in the Hor skor (Huoerguo) Tribe, Khang sar (Kangsai) Township, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Phur 'tsho's mother, Bo gces (b. 1923-2021), was the mother of four sons (Sran mgo, b. 1951; Zla po, 1953-2019; 'Jam mgon, b. 1955; and 'Tshogs po, b. 1957-2022) and three daughters (Phur 'tsho; Ma 'jug, b. 1966; and 'Da' mo, b. 1970). Phur 'tsho was her fifth child. Her father passed away in 1965.

During Phur 'tsho's childhood, Hor skor Dus chung⁸ consisted of about ten households, two leaders, and an accountant who organized the brigade, offering jobs to brigade members over fifteen. All local families lived in yak-hair tents. Phur 'tsho's family lived in a small tent inherited from Bo gces' parents. Men herded yaks, sheep, and horses, while women milked and produced dairy products. From May to September, Bo gces milked twice daily and made butter and other dairy products.

Leaders visited each household, taking from each family a quota of dairy products and livestock each was required to produce. Households were given yaks and sheep to slaughter to provide meat and dairy products. The amount depended on household size. A family of six was given three yaks and three sheep (one yak and one sheep per two family members). Locals typically slaughtered yaks in the eleventh lunar month and sheep in the sixth or seventh lunar month.

The leaders and accountant were responsible for selling brigade livestock and dairy products in Gcig sgril County Town. They were accompanied by two or three young male brigade members who helped herd the livestock to the government slaughterhouse, where a Muslim butcher was paid to kill the animals.

The slaughterhouse paid thirty RMB each for big yaks and fifteen RMB each for small yaks and sheep. The sellers skinned the dead animals.

Cheese and butter were sold to the County Town Bureau of Livestock Husbandry. One kilogram of butter sold for one to two RMB, and one kilogram of cheese sold for four to eight RMB. The sales value was paid to each brigade household after deducting the meat and dairy products that had earlier been allocated to each household.

Phur 'tsho's family had four neighbors who were relatives, including her maternal uncle's (Don grub, 1931-1990) family. The four families mutually assisted each other, and the families' children often played and herded yak calves together.

⁸ CT=Colloquial Tibetan; LT=Literary Tibetan. CT: *Dee chong* (LT: *ru chung*) = Ch: *xiaodui* 'small brigade' 'production team'. Communes consisted of *Ru chin* 'big brigades' that were further divided into *dus chung*. Hereafter, I use "brigade" for *dus chung*.

Bo gces was responsible for milking twenty yaks and helped a neighbor milk the twenty yaks she had been assigned. Bo gces' family was not responsible for herding sheep.

Her son, Zla po, herded twenty yaks while her oldest son, Sran mgo, was a tractor driver for Khang sar Township and transported goods. Phur 'tsho helped the youngest son, 'Tshogs po, herd calves and yaks.

Bo gces, Zla po, and Sran mgo each received 0.10 RMB per day as payment for their work. Phur 'tsho and her other siblings were under fifteen and had no jobs.

'Jam mgon was given to his maternal aunt, who could not give birth. He herded yak calves for his adopted family.

Locals wore sheepskin robes and leather boots. Bo gces would bury dried yak skins unearthen them when they were soft, cut the leather into pieces of appropriate size and shape, and sew them together with yak leather string using an awl and needle to make boots for her children.

Don grub herded sheep. He kept the skin of sheep killed by wolves and those that had died from illness and sewed the skins into robes for his children and Phur 'tsho's children.

Phur 'tsho's family's main food was roasted barley flour, butter, cheese, milk, and yogurt. Bo gces roasted barley in a metal pot on the adobe stove and ground it with a stone mill.

Sran mgo bought items such as barley, flour, salt, pots, scoops, bowls, long underwear, shirts, and scarves at the township town for his family from his family's salary.

HERDING LIFE

At seven, Phur 'tsho cared for her younger sisters and helped her mother fetch water, collect yak dung for fuel, and cook. Sometimes, she herded her family's calves with 'Tshogs po and neighboring children who also herded their families' calves. Phur 'tsho played with her herding mates, who sang while they herded together. This motivated Phur 'tsho to learn some songs, so Bo gces taught her to sing in return for her fetching water and herding calves. Phur 'tsho was passionate about learning new songs and also learned songs from neighboring older female relatives.

Phur 'tsho's friends would ask Bo gces to allow Phur 'tsho to spend the night at their home, and Bo gces typically agreed. Phur 'tsho enjoyed spending nights at her friends' tents because she could learn new songs while listening to elders sing in the tents.

Phur 'tsho learned this herding song from older women during these years.

TEXT AS PERFORMED

¹ནོར་ལ་ནག་རྩུང་རྩེ་མགོའི་ཟེལ་བ་རེད།

²འདྲིའི་ལ་ནོར་རྩེ་འཛམ་གླིང་ཉི་མ་རེད།

³ལྷག་ལ་ལག་ག་ནམ་མཁའི་སྐར་མ་རེད།

⁴འདྲིའི་ལ་ལྷག་རྩེ་བཙོ་ལའི་དྲུང་ཟླ་རེད།

⁵རྟ་ལ་འདྲོ་བ་མཚོ་ཁའི་མེ་ཉྒྲག་རེད།

⁶འདྲིའི་ལ་རྟ་རྩེ་མཚོ་ནང་ནོར་བུ་རེད།

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

¹ནོར་ནག་རྩུང་རྩེ་མགོའི་ཟེལ་བ་རེད།

²འདྲིའི་ནོར་རྩེ་འཛམ་གླིང་ཉི་མ་རེད།

³ལྷག་ལག་ག་ནམ་མཁའི་སྐར་མ་རེད།

⁴འདྲིའི་ལྷག་རྩེ་བཙོ་ལའི་དྲུང་ཟླ་རེད།

⁵རྟ་འདྲོ་བ་མཚོ་ཁའི་མེ་ཉྒྲག་རེད།

⁶འདྲིའི་རྟ་རྩེ་མཚོ་ནང་ནོར་བུ་རེད།

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

¹Black yaks are dew on mountain peaks' grassy tops

²Yak herders are the cosmic sun

³Yearlings are glittering stars in the sky

⁴Shepherds are the milky full moon

⁵Horses are colorful flowers on the lake banks

⁶Horse-herders are the lake's inner jewel

In 1972, Zla po bought a rectangular black radio from the County Town, and the family listened to news and songs broadcast by the Mtsho sngon Tibetan Radio Station. Phur 'tsho and her siblings listened to a radio broadcast each night at nine PM. She was only interested in the singing part of the broadcast when different singers sang various songs. Songs that had been broadcast earlier were sometimes rebroadcast.

Zla po slept alone in a small sod-brick room covered with willow branches near the family tent and would take the radio with him when he went to bed. If he went to bed early, Phur 'tsho would ask Zla po to loan her his radio so she could listen to songs, and he usually agreed. Phur 'tsho would put the radio next to her pillow and

listen. News bored her, but she forced herself to listen, fearful of missing the songs. She turned off the radio a few times when boredom set in and then discovered she had missed the singing part once she turned the radio back on. Her family had no watches or clocks, so it was easy to miss a set time.

She learned this song from listening to the radio.

TEXT AS PERFORMED

¹འདིའི་ནི་རྩ་མགོ་རི་མགོ་སྒྲན་ལྷན་རེད།

²དྲི་ཞིས་པོ་ཁ་ཆེའི་ར་གུར་ཀུམ་རེད།

³འདིའི་ནི་རྩ་སྐད་རི་སྐད་མེ་རྟག་རེད།

⁴སྐྱེ་ཞེ་ཡག་པ་མེ་རྟག་མེ་མེ་ཆེན་རེད།

⁵འདིའི་ནི་རྩ་ཞོས་རི་ཞོས་ཆུ་འགོ་རེད།

⁶ཆུ་ནི་ཡག་པ་འཇམ་སྒྲིང་གསོས་ཆུ་རེད།

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

¹འདིའི་རྩ་མགོ་རི་མགོ་སྒྲན་ལྷན་རེད།

²དྲི་ཞིས་པོ་ཁ་ཆེའི་གུར་ཀུམ་རེད།

³འདིའི་རྩ་སྐད་རི་སྐད་མེ་རྟག་རེད།

⁴སྐྱེ་ཞེ་ཡག་པ་མེ་རྟག་མེ་ཆེན་རེད།

⁵འདིའི་རྩ་ཞོས་རི་ཞོས་ཆུ་འགོ་རེད།

⁶ཆུ་ནི་ཡག་པ་འཇམ་སྒྲིང་འབྲུང་ཆུ་རེད།

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

¹Medicinal herbs cover mountaintops

²Kha che's saffron emits fragrant perfume

³Various flowers bloom on mountain-sides

⁴The marsh marigold is the most beautiful

⁵The mountain foot is rich with springs

⁶The cleanest spring – drinking water for the universe

A MISSING RADIO

Zla po could read and write Tibetan and had basic math knowledge, so he became the tribe accountant in 1974. He calculated each worker's annual salary and recorded each female worker's dairy products. Each year, the tribe leaders and the accountant calculated the amount of dairy products the tribe produced and sold annually and divided the unsold dairy products among brigade members. He wrote a receipt for each family. Each family's head or a family member could take the receipt and get the allocation from the home of a leader who temporarily stored dairy products in their homes.

Once, Zla po's friend, Nyi ma, came to see him to get the receipt for his family. They chatted in the sod-brick room and listened to the radio. Later, Zla po invited his friend to his family tent for a meal. Afterward, feeling tired, Zla po took a short nap. He invited Nyi ma to spend the night at his home, but Nyi ma said he had to return home.

The next day Zla po discovered his radio was missing and also discovered Nyi ma's footprints near the door of his room. Convinced his friend had stolen the radio, he rode a horse to Nyi ma's family, dismounted, and called Nyi ma, who soon came and assured him he had not stolen the radio. Zla po was embarrassed when his friend swore he had not stolen the radio. He trusted Nyi ma and apologized. Nyi ma forgave him and invited him to his home.

The following day, while herding calves, 'Tshogs po opened a bag he discovered in a marmot burrow and found Zla po's radio and a piece of paper. He couldn't read, so he didn't know what was written on the paper. That night, he gave Zla po the bag and paper. Zla po recognized the paper as the receipt for Nyi ma's family he had written two days earlier. He angrily believed he had been lied to and wanted revenge. However, Nyi ma's uncle, Zla po's friend, apologized on behalf of Nyi ma, so he forgave Nyi ma.

Phur 'tsho was delighted with the radio's return and resumed listening to the radio every night, learning more songs. She never forgot that time of the missing radio because she had heard no songs for two days and had been terribly dejected.

MARRIAGE

Bo gces and one of her cousins arranged a marriage for Phur 'tsho when she turned seventeen. Bo gces asked another cousin to consult a local high-ranking *bla ma* to divine the marriage's suitability. The *bla ma* pronounced it was a good marriage, and Phur 'tsho would have a happy life. Bo gces then agreed to the marriage. Phur 'tsho, like other girls, followed her mother and uncle's suggestion.

On an auspicious day, Phur 'tsho wore the outfit her mother had given her: a new sheepskin robe and a silver belt inlaid with coral. Phur 'tsho and Zla po then

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rode horses to her future husband's home. Looking back at her home Phur 'tsho saw
Bo gces watching them leave.

In 2022, Phur 'tsho occasionally sang when she herded and searched for
missing yaks.

PART FIVE: TRANSLATION

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༡༠༡༢ལོར་ངའི་བུ་ཆུང་ཀྱན་དགའ་འོར་བུ་སྐྱེས། ཁོ་རང་ངའི་བུ་ཕྱག་གཅིག་ལུ་ཡིན། ངས་གཡུ་ཡི་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་དེ་རང་གི་བུ་མང་ཡང་ན་ཁོའི་མ་འོངས་
བའི་ཆུང་མ་ལ་སྐྱེར་འདོད། གཡུ་སྤྱང་ལ་བུ་མོ་ཞིག་ཡོད་ཆོ་བུ་མོ་དེར་སྐྱེན་ངེས།

༡༠༡༥ ལོར་ངས་ཁབ་ཀ་གོང་དལ་ནས་བོད་ཀྱི་བྱུང་ཆ་དང་བོད་ལུ་ཉེ་འདོད་སྐྱེས་ནས་ཁྱོད་སྤང་ལུ། ཆོང་ཁང་ཞིག་གི་ནང་དུ་འཇུག་པ་ན་ཆོང་
བདག་གིས་ངའི་སྐྱེ་ཡི་གཡུ་དེ་མཐོང་མ་ཐག། ངའི་ཆེབ་ལ་བཅར་ནས་གཡུ་དེ་ངས་བདག་གིས་ནས་ལོ་ག་ཆོད་འགོར་བ་དང་དེ་བཅོང་མིན་སྐོར་དིས། གཡུ་དེ་ང་ལ་
མཚོན་ན་བྱུ་རྩལ་གལ་ཆེན་ཤིག་ཡིན་པས། ངས་ཆོང་བདག་ལ་དེའི་སྐོར་ཅི་ཡང་མ་བཤད།

སྤྱིར་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་ནི་བྱང་མེད་ཆོད་སྐྱེས་གཞུགས་མཛེས་པར་གཏོང་བྱེད་བྱུ་ཆ་གཅོ་བོ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ། བྱུ་ཆོང་ཞིག་གི་བྱུ་རྩལ་ཀྱི་རིན་ཐང་མཚོན་བྱེད་
ཀྱང་ཡིན། གཡུ་སྤྱང་བྱུ་ཆོང་ཞིག་གི་བུ་མོ་ལ་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་མང་པོ་ཡོད་ན། བྱུ་ཆོང་དེ་ནི་ཕྱག་པོ་ཡིན་པ་དང་བྱུ་ཆོགས་ཀྱི་གོ་གནས་ཀྱང་མཐོན་པོ་ཡོད་པ་སྤྱི་མ་
དགོས། ལོ་ངོ་ཉེ་བྱང་དང་སྤྱི་མཐོན་ཡར་སྤོང་ལ་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་རྩལ་མང་པོ་བདག་གིས་ན་གཞན་གྱིས་དེ་སྤྱི་མཐོན་དང་སྤྱི་མཐོན་པོ་ཡིན་པར་འདོད། ཉེ་རབས་སུ་བྱུ་
ཆོགས་འཕེལ་འགྲུབ་ཀྱི་འགོ་མཉེན་པོ་དང་བསྐྱེད་པའི་མང་པོ་སྤྱི་མཐོན་ལྷན་ཆོད་ཆོད་མཐོར་སོང་བའི་བྱུ་ཀྱིས་བསམ་ཚུལ་དེ་འགྲུབ་ཟིན། མི་མང་གི་འདོད་
སྤྱོད་ཀྱིས་བཀྲང་གི་བྱུ་ཆ་ནི་བྱུ་ཆོད་མཚོན་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྐྱེ་བྱུ་གཅིག་དང་གཉིས་འདོག་པ་ནི་འོས་འཚམས་ཡིན་པར་སྤྱང་། གཡུ་སྤྱང་བྱུ་ཆོད་ཅིག་གིས་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་
མང་པོ་བདག་གིས་ན་གཞན་གྱིས་ཁོ་མོ་ལ་ཁྱེལ་དགོང་ཀྱང་བྱེད་ངེས།

ལོ་མང་པོའི་ཡར་སྤོང་དུ་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་ནི་སྤང་མ་འདྲེས་བའི་བྱུ་ཆ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དག་མ་སོགས་ལས་བཅོས་པ་ཤ་སྤྱག་ཡིན། དེང་སྐབས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་མང་ཤོས་
ཤིག་འདྲེས་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་བྱུ་ཆ་རྩལ་མ་དག་གིས་བཅོས་པ་ཤིང་། བྱུ་ཆ་དེ་དག་གིས་བྱུ་ཆོད་གསལ་མཐན་གྱི་བའི་ཐང་ལ་གཏོང་འོཅ་གཏོང་བྱེད། ཡིན་ནའང་ཆོང་བ་འགའ་
ཤས་ཀྱིས་བྱུ་ཆ་དག་མ་ཡིན་ཞེས་གཞན་ལ་མགོ་སྐོར་བཀྲང་ནས་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་དག་རིན་གོང་མཐོན་པོའི་སྐོར་ནས་བཅོང་གིན་འདུག།

ལོ་ལྔའི་འཁོར་སྐྱོད་དང་བཅོ་ལས་རིག་ཆལ་གྱི་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་དང་བསྐྱེད་ནས་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་གྱི་དབྱིབས་དང་བྱུ་ཆ་སོགས་ལ་འགྲུབ་བཅུན་པོ་ཐོབ་པས། སྤྱོད་ཆད་
མིའི་ལག་བཅོ་བྱས་པའམ་སྤྱབས་བའི་ལུ་འཕེལ་ཆས་བཀོལ་སྤྱོད་བྱས་ནས་དབྱིབས་གོར་གོར་དང་ཐུར་གསུམ་ཅན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་མ་གཏོགས་ཐོན་སྐྱོད་བྱས་མེད། ཉེ་
རབས་སུ་འཕེལ་ཆས་མང་པོ་བཀོལ་ནས་དབྱིབས་དང་རྩལ་པ་མི་འདྲ་བའི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་མང་པོ་བཅོ་སྤྱོད་བྱེད་ཀྱིན་ཡོད།

ངའི་ལ་ཡུལ་རྒྱང་ཆར་མཚོན་ན་བྱུ་ཆོང་གི་བདག་མོ་ཆོས་རང་གི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་བུ་མོར་བག་རྒྱུང་དུ་སྤྱོད་པའམ་ཡང་ན་བྱུ་ཆོང་གི་མཉམ་པ་ལ་ལེགས་
སྐྱེས་ཀྱི་ཆུལ་དུ་སྤྱོད་པ་ཤིང་། གཡུ་སྤྱང་བྱུ་ཆོང་ཞིག་ལ་བྱང་མེད་འགའ་ཤེས་ཡོད་ན། བུ་མོ་ཆོར་འདྲ་མཉམ་སྐྱེས་བྱུ་ཆོང་གི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་བགོ་བ་ཤིང་། དེང་ཆོང་ལ་བུ་མོ་
སྤྱོད་གསུམ་ཡོད། གཅེན་མོ་ཆེ་ཤོས་གཉིན་སྤྱིག་པ་ལྟ་བུའི་བྱུ་ཀྱིས་མོ་ལ་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་མང་པོ་ཐོབ་ཡོད།

ང་ཆོད་པའི་སྤེལ་སྤྱོད་ན་བྱུ་ཆོང་གི་བདག་མོ་ལ་བྱུ་ཆོང་དེའི་བྱུ་ཆོད་བདག་དབང་ཡོད། ཁོ་མོ་ཆོས་དུས་བྱུ་རྩལ་བྱུ་ཆོད་འདོགས་པ་དང་ཉར་
ཆགས་བྱེད་པ་ཤིང་། ངའི་ཨ་ཙེ་ལ་གཞི་ཡི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་དང་ཕྱིང་བ་མང་པོ་ཡོད། གཅེན་མོ་ཆེ་བ་ལོ་དུག་ལ་སོན་སྐབས་མི་ནུས་ཀྱིས་ཨ་ཙེ་ཆོང་ལ་སོང་ནས་ཆོད་མོ་ཆེ་བ་
ཤིང་། མོས་བཤད་པ་སྤྱོད་ན་མི་ཨ་ཙེ་འོ་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་ལ་དགའ་བ་སྤྱོད་པས། ཨ་ཙེས་མོ་ལ་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་གཅིག་གཤམ་དུ་བཅུག། ཨ་ཙེ་ལ་མི་རང་གི་བྱུ་ཆ་ལི་བདག་དབང་ཡོད་
པས་མོའི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་གཞན་ལ་སྤྱོད་ནའང་མོའི་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་དང་བྱུ་ཆོང་མོ་ལ་ཆེ་ཡང་མི་བཤད། མོས་རང་གི་བྱུ་ཆ་བཅོང་འདོད་པའམ་ཡང་ན་གཞན་ལ་སྤྱོད་བསམ་ན་
ཡང་མི་རང་གིས་ཐག་གཅོད་བྱེད་ཆོག་ལོ་དུ་མའི་རྩལ་སྤྱོད་ཆོས་ཨ་ཙེས་བདམས་པའི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་དེ་གཞི་རྩ་ཆེན་ཞིག་ཡིན་པ་ཤིས།

མི་མང་པོའི་སེམས་སུ་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་ནི་བྱུ་རྩལ་གལ་ཆེན་ཞིག་ཡིན་པས། དེས་ཀྱི་བདག་དང་དེའི་བྱུ་ཆོད་བགེགས་པར་ཆད་ལས་སེམས་བར་བྱེད་ཐུབ་པར་
འདོད། ཨ་མས་བཤད་ཀྱིས་གཡུ་སྤྱང་པའི་གཅིག་གི་སྤེལ་ལ་རིན་ཐང་ཆེ་བའི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་ཞིག་ཡོད་ན། སྐྱེ་བྱུ་དེས་བྱང་བ་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་སྤེལ་ཆོང་མ་སྤང་སྤྱོད་བྱེད་
ཐུབ། གཅེན་མོ་ཆེ་ཤོས་ཀྱིས་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་གྱི་པན་ནུས་དེ་དངོས་སུ་ཐུངས་ཡོད། མོས་རང་གི་གཞི་ཡི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་ལ་དུག་ལེན་པའི་རུས་པ་ལྟར་པར་འདོད། ༡༩༩༩ ལོར་མོ་རང་
ནད་གྱི་གཅོས་པས་སྤྱོད་ཁང་ནང་དུ་སོང་ནས་གཤག་བཅོས་ཐེངས་དུ་མར་བྱས། མོ་རང་གཤག་བཅོས་བྱེད་སྐབས་མོའི་གཞི་དེའི་སྤྱོད་གི་དཀར་ཐིག་དག་ནག་པོར་
ཐུར་བ་དང་འོད་མདངས་ཡང་མི་གསལ་བར་བྱས། བྱུ་མཚན་ནི་གཞི་དེས་མོའི་ལུས་སྤྱོད་གི་བཅི་སྤྱོད་ནད་གི་དུག་དག་སེལ་བ་ཤིང་། གཤག་བཅོས་ལེགས་འགྲུབ་བྱུང་
རྗེས་གཞི་དེའི་སྤྱོད་གི་དཀར་ཐིག་དག་ཕྱིར་གསལ་པོར་མངོན་ཞིང་འོད་མདངས་ཡང་བྱས། ཨ་ཙེས་གཞི་དེས་བྱང་འཁོར་བཞིན་མོ་རང་སྤང་སྤྱོད་བྱས་པར་བསམ་
ཡོད།

ང་ལ་མཚོན་ན་བྱུ་ཆ་ལི་དག་རྩལ་དགར་བྱུ་ཉ་ཅང་དཀའ་མོ་ཤིང་། ཨ་མ་དང་ཨ་ཙེ་ཆེ་བ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བྱུ་ཆོད་དག་རྩལ་སྐོར་ལ་འབྲེལ་བཤད་
གསལ་པོ་མི་ཤས་བྱང་། ཁོ་ཆོས་བྱུ་ཆ་ལག་ལ་འཛིན་པ་དང་། རིག་པ། མོ་འདེབས་པ། ཁ་དོག་དང་མདོག་གི་གསལ་ཆད་ལ་སྤྱང་། ཉེ་འོད་འོག་ནས་མདོག་གི་འགྲུབ་
སྤངས་སོགས་ལ་བརྟག་ནས་བྱུ་ཆ་ལི་དག་རྩལ་དགར་ཐུབ།

སྐྱེ་བྱུ་གྱི་རིན་ཐང་ཆེ་ཆུང་ནི་དེའི་བྱུ་ཆ་བྱུ་སྤྱིས་གསར་སྤྱོད་སོགས་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་དམ་པོ་ཡོད། སྐྱེ་བྱུ་སྤྱོད་བདག་ནི་ལག་ཆལ་བཟང་བའི་བཅོ་བ་
རྩམས་ཀྱིས་སྤྱི་མཐོང་ལ་སྤྱང་མེད་པའི་བྱུ་ཆ་བཀོལ་ནས་བཅོས་ཡོད་པས་རིན་ཐང་ཆེ། དེ་མིན་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་སྤྱོད་བདག་གིས་བྱུ་བདག་རྩམས་ཀྱི་ཐོབ་ཐང་དང་རིག་
གནས་ཤིག་གི་རིན་ཐང་ཡང་མཚོན་ཐུབ། དེང་སྐབས་མི་སུ་ཡིན་ཡང་ཕྱིང་བ་རྩལ་མ་དང་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་རྩལ་མ་སོགས་གང་འདོད་དུ་སྤྱོད་ཐུབ་པས། སྐྱེ་བྱུ་གྱི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་
ཡིན་པའི་རིན་ཐང་དེ་ལས།

གང་སྤྱོད་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་སྤྱོད་བདག་ལ་རིན་ཐང་གཞན་དུ་མེད། དེ་དག་གིས་མི་སྤྱོད་དང་། བྱུ་ཆོང་། སྤེལ་པན་ཆུན་དབར་དང་མི་རབས་ལྟུང་བར་ལ་
རིག་གནས་དོན་སྤྱོད་ཁྱད་པར་བ་ཞིག་བརྒྱུད་སྤེལ་བྱེད་ཐུབ། སྐྱེ་བྱུ་སྤྱོད་བདག་གིས་ས་གནས་ཀྱི་སྤེལ་བྱུ་རིག་གནས་དང་བྱུ་ཆོང་ཞིག་གི་བྱུ་ཆོད་མིའི་བར་གྱི་
འབྲེལ་བ་དམ་པོ་དེ་མཚོན་ཐུབ། སྐྱེ་བྱུ་ཞིག་མི་རབས་ནས་མི་རབས་བརྒྱུད་པ་དེས་བྱུ་ཆོད་མིའི་བར་གྱི་དངས་གཅོང་གི་བཅེ་བ་དེ་བཅོང་ཡོད། གཡུ་ཡི་སྐྱེ་བྱུ་འདི་
ང་ལ་མཚོན་ན་གཅིག་ལས་གཉིས་མེད་དང་རིན་ཐང་གཞན་དུ་མེད་པའི་བྱུ་ཆོད་ཞིག་ཡིན། བྱུ་ཆོད་འདི་ནི་ང་རང་བའི་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་འཛོལ་པོ་ལ་ལ་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱི་
ཆོགས་གསོག་པར་བྱེད་པའི་རྟེན་ཡང་ཡིན།

PART SIX: SCRIPTS

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SILENT WOMEN

CHARACTERS

FAMILY 1

Name	Description
Dele	Lhadzom and Drashi's father, Tsomo's husband
Tsomo	Lhadzom and Drashi's mother; Dele's wife; Shebo's sister
Shebo	Tsomo's brother
Tsoko	Tsomo's mother, Lhadzom, and Drashi's maternal grandmother
Drakyi	Dele's mother, Lhadzom' and Drashi's paternal grandmother
Drashi	Dele and Tsomo's son, Lhadzom's brother
Lhadzom	Dele and Tsomo's daughter; Wangchuk's wife and Ngakwang's mother

FAMILY 2

Gyatso	Dzebo's son; Badko's brother; Gangdron's stepfather; Dekyi's husband; Lhamo and Drogon's father
Dekyi	Gangdron, Lhamo and Drogon's mother; Gyatso's wife
Drogon	Gyatso and Dekyi's son
Dzebo	Gyatso and Badkho's mother - grandmother to Drogon and Lhamo
Dorje	Badkho's son
Gangdron	Gyatso's stepdaughter and Dekyi's daughter; Dawa's wife
Lhamo	Gyatso and Dekyi's daughter
Badkho	Dzebo's son; Gyatso's brother; Dorje's father

FAMILY 3

Belzang	Dawa's father
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Dawa Belzang's son; Gangdron's husband

FAMILY 4

Wangchuk Lhadzom's husband; Lutso's son; Ngakwang's father
 Lhadzom Wangchuk's wife, Ngakwang's mother
 Lutso Wangchuk's mother, Sodrak's sister
 Tsoyag Lutso's sister
 Ngakwang Lhadzom and Wangchuk's son
 Tsegon Gangdron's lover
 Drala Badkho's wife's mother

OTHER CHARACTERS

Trinbo local community member, Dongnyi's father
 Gangtso Lhadzom's neighbor
 Lama will soon enter seclusion; visits local communities soliciting food (e.g., butter and dry cheese) for the time of religious seclusion
 Monk the lama's devotee
 Leader a local community leader
 Nekyab a local resident
 Pakba a local resident
 Guru a local resident
 Dongnyi Trinbo's son

NOTES

batsa a mantra that improves wisdom
 Jobo a sacred depiction of Gautama Buddha known as Jowo Shakyamuni/Jowo Rinpoche kept in the the Jowo Temple in Lhasa
khadak a strip of white silk offered to others to show respect
ommanibemehum The Six Sacred Syllables; reciting this mantra release deceased creatures from suffering
zamba roasted barely flour mixed with butter and hot tea
 Tibetan Tibetan names and terms appear in phonetic renderings of the Golok Tibetan dialect.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGES - DAY

Mountain ranges pass below. A valley is shrouded in fog.

EXT. SUMMER PASTURE - MORNING

Two tents are pitched at the bottom of a high mountain on flat land in a valley. Smoke rises into the air from the tent's top hole. A small stream runs through the valley in front of the tents. Yaks, sheep, and horses graze placidly along the stream near the tents. Lambs bleat and run to their mothers as dogs bark mindlessly.

EXT. LHADZOM'S HOME - MORNING

LHADZOM, seven years old, sits by her family's tent entrance. A bowl of rice noodles is next to her. She puts a finger into her mouth, bites the fingernail with her teeth, clinches the broken fingernail between the other hand's thumb and index finger, and jerks it away.

LHADZOM'S VOICE (V.O.)

My paternal grandmother died a few months ago. I often sat next to my family's tent entrance with her. We had breakfast there on sunny mornings. I sat on her lap, listened to her stories, and sometimes nursed her withered nipples. My parents told me Grandmother would not come to see me again, even in the morning. I sit at the tent entrance, waiting for her. I don't believe my parents. Grandmother loves and misses me. She'll wake up and tell me more stories. We'll have breakfast together again.

DRASHI, six years old, emerges from their family tent. He wears a sheepskin robe and traditional leather boots and runs toward a small pool near their family's tent, where DROGON and Lhamo are playing.

LHADZOM

Brother, where are you going?

DRASHI

(without looking at Lhadzom)

I'm going to play.

Lhadzom stands up as TSOMO comes out of the tent.

TSOMO

Where's he going?

LHADZOM

He's going to play with Drogon and Lhamo.

Tsomo watches Drogon and Lhamo playing at the pool.

TSOMO

I hope they're not killing frogs and fish.

LHADZOM

I want to play with them.

TSOMO

Don't kill fish and frogs. I'll beat you if you kill frogs and fish.

LHADZOM

I don't kill frogs. I'm afraid of frogs and fish. I'll tell you if Drashi kills frogs and fish.

Lhadzom rushes to the children as her mother enters their family's tent.

INT. LHADZOM'S HOME

Wooden boxes, stuffed leather bags, and folded wool blankets are stacked in the tent's upper part. A small square altar made of rocks and earth is in the upper right corner of the tent. Religious images on the table are illuminated by butter lamps that flicker in front of the images. Clothes are stacked on the lower part of the tent. Dry yak dung is piled in a corner.

Tsomo sits by a milk separator placed on one side of the tent. She adds two scoops of milk to the separator's milk container and one scoop of cold milk from the milk bucket. She turns the separator's handle with her right hand, sending cream and skim milk in two separate streams to different metal basins on the ground, one on either side of the separator. Two big chunks of butter wrapped in yak stomach are atop two big rocks next to the milk separator.

EXT. POOL - DAY

Drogon, seven years old, jumps into the pool, wades through the water, and catches a frog. He grabs one of its hind legs and swings it back and forth.

Drashi removes his sheepskin robe and boots near the pool and rolls up the legs of his long underwear.

He walks toward Lhadzom. She shouts and runs away. Lhamo, six years old, follows her.

DRASHI

Give it to me.

Drogon hands the frog to Drashi.

DROGON

Don't squeeze it! It's a gentle frog.

DRASHI

Okay. I'll not kill it.

Lhadzom and Lhamo come near the boys as Drashi holds the frog. Drashi opens his hand once the frog stops struggling. The frog jumps from his palm. He blocks the frog with his foot as it hops toward the pool on the ground. The frog hops in another direction, and Drogon stops the frog with his foot. Finally, the frog jumps into the water.

DRASHI (CONT'D)

What a wild frog!

Drashi picks up dried yak dung and throws it at the frog swimming in the pool.

The frog rolls over and floats on the water's surface without moving - a white belly with motionless outstretched legs.

Lhadzom and Lhamo join them when they notice the frog is not in Drogon's palm.

LHAMO

(screams)

You killed it!

DROGON

I didn't kill it.

LHADZOM

Who killed it? Ommanibemehum.

Drogon wades into the water and picks up the dead frog. He chants the Six Sacred Syllables, blows at the dead frog, and looks at Drashi.

DROGON

I didn't kill it, but I know who did.

LHAMO

Suppose you didn't kill it. Who killed it? I'll tell our parents you did if you don't tell me.

DRASHI

(softly)

Don't tell them, or they won't let us play together.

Drogon points at Drashi.

DROGON

He killed it.

Drashi punches Drogon's head.

DRASHI

Don't tell our parents I killed it.

EXT. LHADZOM'S HOME - DAY

Tsomo stands at her family's tent entrance.

TSOMO

(shouts to her children)

Lunch is ready! Have lunch!

EXT. POOL - DAY

Drashi rolls down the legs of his long underwear and pulls on his robe and boots.

DRASHI

Okay. We'll come soon.

LHADZOM

(to Lhamo)

Come to my home. We can have lunch together.

LHAMO

No, thanks. I promised Mother I'd return home at lunchtime.

DROGON

We can play together tomorrow.

DRASHI

Yeah.

Lhadzom runs over to her family's tent. Drashi slowly follows Lhadzom.

INT. LHADZOM'S HOME - DAY

Drashi sits quietly on one side of the tent, holds a bread bun in his hand, and places a plastic bowl of milk tea next to him.

Lhadzom sits by Tsomo and takes a bun from a full plate of buns in front of them. She bites it and drinks tea from Tsomo's bowl.

TSOMO

What have you done?

Drashi doesn't respond and lowers his head. Lhadzom smiles at Tsomo and cranes her head, looking at Drashi over the stove.

TSOMO (CONT'D)

Did you do a bad thing?

DRASHI

(quietly)

No.

TSOMO

Really? Are you sure?

DRASHI

Yeah.

TSOMO

Liar. Stop lying to me. You didn't kill a frog?

Drashi remains silent.

TSOMO (CONT'D)

What a sinful boy. I'll beat you if you kill another frog!

No response from Drashi.

INT. LHADZOM'S HOME - DAY

Drashi pours hot liquid butter into a butter lamp bowl from a soot-covered kettle. He uses a match and lights the butter lamp on the family's shrine altar, made of earth mixed with yak dung and gravel. He glances at Tsomo, who sits on one side of the tent.

DRASHI

Mother, I lit the butter lamp.

TSOMO

Great.

Drashi runs to Tsomo from one side of the tent to the other, where she sits. He sits on her lap and hugs her.

DRASHI

Mother, please don't tell Father I killed a frog. He'll beat me if you tell him.

TSOMO

Why did you kill the frog if you're sure Father will beat you if you kill frogs?

DRASHI

The frog jumped into the water from my palm after biting me.

TSOMO

Show me where it bit you.

Drashi inspects his palms and smiles.

TSOMO

Liar. I'll tell your father if you kill frogs again.

Drashi nods and stands next to Tsomo.

DRASHI

(spanking himself on his bottom)

You can beat me if I kill frogs again.

Drashi rushes out of the tent.

EXT. BICYCLE - DAY

Drogon gets on his small bicycle - flat rear tire, one pedal missing, and no chain. Drashi grabs its rear pannier rack and pushes as Drogon tightly grasps the bike's handlebars. The bike rolls down the hill. Drashi runs after Drogon. Lhadzom stands still, watching.

Drogon gets off the bike as it stops at the foot of the hill, tosses it to the ground, and rests, sitting on the ground. Drashi grabs the bike handles and pushes the bike up to the hilltop. Drashi gets on the bike when he gets near Lhadzom, who stands at the top of the mound.

LHADZOM

It's my turn. Let me ride it.

DRASHI

You're a girl. Girls don't ride bikes. Push it.

Lhadzom pushes the rear pannier rack and stops as the bike speeds down the hill. She watches Drashi riding down the hill. The bike's front wheel hits a small rock, and the bike almost topples over.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

GANGDRON and TSEGON, both in their early twenties, sit on a small riverbank within a valley near Gangdron's tent. They can't see her tent, nor can her family members see them. She bends her head into Tsegon's arms and looks at his face. Tsegon strokes her head. She stares at his round silver earring, inlaid with coral in his left ear. His long hair covers half of the earring.

His riding yak grazes nearby.

TSEGON

Do your parents know about our relationship?

GANGDRON

They don't know, I guess.

TSEGON

You should tell them about our relationship since we've been boyfriend and girlfriend for two years.

GANGDRON

They won't let me marry who I want.

TSEGON

(puzzled)

Why?

GANGDRON

They think I'm stupid and won't marry a good man.

TSEGON

Your mother hasn't asked if you have a lover?

GANGDRON

I lied each time she asked. I told her I couldn't find one.

TSEGON

(seriously)

Next time don't lie. Tell the truth or your parents will find a lover for you and we won't be able to marry.

GANGDRON

I'll only marry you. I prefer to become a nun rather than marry another man.

He puts his arm around her.

Music.

GANGDRON

Now, I should go home before my neighbors or relatives see us. It's embarrassing if someone discovers I'm with you.

TSEGON

When will we meet again?

GANGDRON

You decide.

TSEGON

I'll come to see you here ten days from today, at this time.

GANGDRON

Okay.

He kisses her and mounts his riding yak.

EXT. LHADZOM'S FAMILY YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

Drashi climbs on Drogon's back with his arms around Drogon's neck. Drogon holds Drashi's legs, preventing Drashi from falling. Drogon struggles to maintain his balance. He walks unsteadily. Drashi holds a short rope. A dry piece of wood is tied to one rope end.

DRASHI

Lhadzom, you are the dog. Lhamo is the dog's master. I'm the guest. Drogon is my horse!

LHADZOM

Okay.

Lhamo nods her head. Lhadzom scuttles on her hands and feet like a dog, moving near Drashi and Drogon.

LHADZOM (CONT'D)

(making dog sounds)

Bow-Wow!

Lhamo tries to prevent Lhadzom from getting near Drashi and Drogon.

Drashi swings the rope over his head as Lhadzom approaches him and Drogon. He hits Lhadzom's back with all his strength. Drogon loses balance, and they topple to the ground.

Lhadzom lies on the ground and bursts into tears. Lhamo goes near Lhadzom.

LHAMO

Don't cry.

Drashi stands up, touches his hip, and walks over with a limp.

DRASHI

Don't cry. We're just playing. I'm also hurt. My hip is painful.

LHADZOM

I will tell Mother you beat me with that piece of wood.

DROGON

Don't cry. I'll give you sugar when Grandmother gives me sugar the next time.

DRASHI

Stop crying. Drogon is going to give you sugar.

LHADZOM

You hurt me! I can't stand the pain!

Lhadzom squats on the ground.

Music.

Drashi pushes Drogon and runs away. Drogon almost falls and then chases Drashi. Lhamo stands, watches Drogon and Drashi, and then runs after them. Lhadzom stands up and rushes to her family's tent.

EXT. DELE'S FAMILY YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

DELE, Tsomo, Drashi, and Lhadzom drive their family's yaks into the yak enclosure. Lhadzom follows Dele.

INT. DELE'S HOME - NIGHT

Drashi and Tsomo sit on one side of the tent, while Dele and Lhadzom sit on the other.

DELE

What have you done today?

DRASHI

Nothing.

Dele tilts his head.

DELE

I can't hear you. Come here.

Drashi reluctantly walks to Dele.

DELE (CONT'D)

Give me your hand.

Drashi stretches out his hand. Dele sniffs it.

DELE (CONT'D)

Give me the other one.

Drashi offers his other hand to Dele. Dele sniffs it.

DELE (CONT'D)

(a little angry)

What did you kill today?

DRASHI

I didn't kill anything.

Dele spans Drashi.

DELE

Who killed a frog?

Drashi sobs and doesn't reply. Dele spans him again.

DELE (CONT'D)

Will you kill frogs and beat your sister again?

DRASHI

No, Father. I won't kill frogs and bully my sister again.

DELE

Stop crying.

Drashi stops crying.

DELE (CONT'D)

Stop crying and have supper.

Drashi walks over to Tsomo and sits by her. Tsomo gives him a bun from a nearby blue plastic basin.

TSOMO

Don't cry. Eat quickly. We must go to bed.

INT. DELE'S HOME - NIGHT

Drashi sleeps with Tsomo on one side of the tent, and Lhadzom sleeps with Dele on the other.

DRASHI

(chants a mantra)

Ommanibemehum....

DELE

You forgot to chant *batsa* (a mantra that improves wisdom).

LHADZOM

I'm sleepy. I'll chant tomorrow.

DELE

You should chant every night. You'll become smarter if you go to school, you'll learn easily.

LHADZOM

I don't want to go to school. I'll miss my family.

DELE

You are my good daughter. You should go to school. You won't need to herd yaks if you go to school.

LHADZOM

I want to herd yaks rather than attend school.

DELE

What a bad girl. Bad girls don't go to school.

Lhadzom pulls Dele's ear.

LHADZOM

I'm not a bad girl. I'm your good daughter.

DELE

Right. You are my good daughter. Don't pull my ear. Good girls go to bed on time. Let's sleep.

Dele closes his eyes.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom and Lhamo put small white and small black stones in lines near Lhadzom's family tent.

LHADZOM

Did you see my family's white female yak? I lost it yesterday.

Lhamo picks up a white stone and gives it to Lhadzom.

LHAMO

Yeah. It's with my family's yaks.

LHADZOM

I herded my family's yaks yesterday and then fell asleep at noon. I worried all night wolves would eat her.

LHAMO

Your yak is safe. You're a lucky herder but not a good one.

Lhadzom picks up a big black stone and hands it to Lhamo.

LHADZOM

You're a bad herder, too. Your family's old black yak is in my family's herd.

Lhamo takes the stone from Lhadzom and places it on one end of the lined-up stones in front of her.

LHAMO

What a bad herder I am! I didn't even notice it was missing.

LHADZOM

We should try our best to be good herders.

LHAMO

Right.

Drashi and Drogon join them. Drashi takes a piece of crystal sugar from his pants pocket and puts it in his mouth.

LHADZOM

Who gave you that sugar?

DRASHI

Drogon.

LHADZOM

Do you have any more?

DRASHI

No. Ask Drogon.

LHADZOM

Give me a piece of sugar.

Drogon licks a piece of crystal sugar in his hand and then points it at Lhadzom.

DROGON

I only have this piece. I don't have any more.

LHADZOM

May I lick it? Where did you get sugar?

DROGON

No. You can't lick it. It's mine. My grandmother gave it to me. You can ask your grandmother to give you sugar.

Lhadzom lowers her head and says nothing.

LHAMO

Her grandmother is dead.

Drogon sticks out his tongue and hands his sugar to Lhadzom.

Lhadzom takes the sugar from Drogon. She bites a small piece of the sugar and hands the rest to Drogon.

DROGON

I have two grandmothers. Do you have another grandmother?

LHADZOM

I don't know.

DROGON

(Chuckles)

Stupid! You don't even know if you have another grandmother?

Drogon points at Lhadzom and laughs.

DROGON (CONT'D)

Someone doesn't have a grandmother. I have two grandmothers.

Lhadzom cries and puts her head in her arms.

Music.

Drogon runs away. Drashi follows.

LHAMO

Don't cry. Let's go to my home. Probably my grandmother will give you sugar.

Lhadzom stops crying, but tears continue trickling down her cheeks.

A month later

EXT. LHADZOM'S HOME - DAY

A LAMA wears a yellow monk cassock and rides a white horse. His horse's neck has red, yellow, and white pieces of cloth tied to its mane. A MONK clad in a traditional monk robe rides a black horse and leads a red horse with saddlebags.

Tsomo rushes out of her family's tent as her family's watchdog barks. She walks toward the monks.

TSOMO

(bends toward the monks)

Please come to my home and have some tea.

LAMA

No, thanks. We already had lunch with a family from your tribe.

TSOMO

Okay.

Lama looks at the monk.

LAMA (CONT'D)

He's my student.

The monk bends his head toward the lama.

LAMA

We're from Tanggar Community. We are preparing to go into seclusion in a cave in our community. We need butter and cheese, so we have come here to beg for some. It's okay if you don't give us any.

TSOMO

We have butter and cheese. What a great opportunity to support you!

Tsomo hurries to her family's tent.

The lama and the monk dismount and sit on the ground crossed-legged. The lama takes a red cloth bag from his shoulder and places it beside him.

Tsomo brings a big piece of butter on a flat pot lid and a full bowl of dried cheese. Drashi and Lhadzom follow Tsomo. Tsomo gives the butter and cheese to the monk and kneels in front of the lama. Drashi and Lhadzom stand next to Tsomo. Tsomo nudges Drashi's leg.

TSOMO (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Kneel.

The lama looks at Lhadzom.

LAMA

Are you a student? How are you doing at school?

LHADZOM

No.

LAMA

Are you going to school?

LHADZOM

I'm not going to school.

LAMA

Attend school. You'll have a happy life if you go to school.

LHADZOM

No. I'm not going to school. My grandmother told me school is where people starve.

Lhadzom stops talking as Tsomo hits Lhadzom's thigh.

The lama chuckles and touches Drashi's head. Drashi keeps his head down and dares not look at the lama.

LAMA

Are you going to school?

DRASHI

I don't know.

The lama looks at Tsomo.

LAMA

Are you going to send him to school?

TSOMO

His father will decide.

The lama takes several protection knots from his bag, recites mantras, and blows at the knots. He gives one to DRASHI.

LAMA

This will protect you from evil. You will learn things fast at school if you chant mantras.

Drashi takes it from the lama without raising his head.

The lama gives knots to Tsomo and Lhadzom. Tsomo puts her palms together and bows to the lama as she takes the knot.

TSOMO

Please give me a protection knot for my husband. He's herding our family's yaks.

LAMA

Sure.

DEKYI holds a basin full of dried cheese with a big piece of butter on top. She walks to the lama. GYATSO, Drogon, DZEBO, and LHAMO follow her.

Dekyi gives the basin to the monk. The monk takes it and places it next to the food Tsomo gave. The monk takes a saddlebag from the packhorse. The monk puts the butter in a plastic bag in one of the saddlebags and puts the cheese into a plastic bag in the other saddlebag.

The monk hands the basin and pot lid to Dekyi and Tsomo.

Dekyi, Gyatso, Drogon, Dzebo, and Lhamo kneel before the lama.

The lama gives a protection knot to Dzebo.

LAMA

How old are you?

DZEBO

Seventy.

The lama chants and blows over Dzebo's head. He gives a protection knot to Dzebo.

LAMA

(to Dzebo)

This knot will extend your lifespan.

DZEBO

Have a long life.

The lama blows over them as the others bend their heads toward him. He gives protection knots to all who have not received one.

Dekyi secretly hits Gyatso.

GYATSO

Lama, please divine for my daughter. We'll arrange for her to marry a man from Martang Community. Will it be a good marriage?

The lama takes a string of prayer beads from around his neck. While chanting, he blows on the beads and closes his eyes. He touches the prayer beads to his forehead in three sections. He opens his eyes and counts the number of beads in two sections.

LAMA

Don't worry! The marriage will be good. It will be good for her to chant *Drolma* (a mantra).

GYATSO

Thank you.

The lama stands.

LAMA

Now, we are leaving. Thank you for the food.

GYATSO

Our pleasure.

Gyatso holds the reins of the lama's horse to keep it calm. He lifts the lama's right leg to help him mount the horse.

LAMA

Goodbye.

GYATSO

Have a long life.

DZEBO

Have a long life.

Gyatso and Dzebo walk to their tents.

TSOMO

Come to my home.

GYATSO

No, thanks.

DZEBO

No. I have to make butter lamps.

Dekyi and Tsomo sit together on the ground.

TSOMO

It seems that Gangdron will have a good life with Dawa.

DEKYI

BELZANG's a good man, so his son must be a good man.

TSOMO

Right. She'll have a good life if Dawa's a good man and kind to her.

DEKYI

Who knows? Gyatso is kind to Gangdron and treats her as his daughter. He arranged the marriage. I agreed with him.

TSOMO

Gyatso's a good man.

DEKYI

Belzang is Gyatso's friend. He thought it was good for them to marry.

TSOMO

It's important to marry a good man.

DEKYI

Right. If a woman marries a bad man, she becomes his family's slave.

Dekyi and Tsomo take their basins and walk to their tents.

INT. LHADZOM'S HOME - NIGHT

Tsomo sits on one side of the tent. Dele and Drashi sit on the other side. Dele finishes eating noodles and hands his bowl to Tsomo over the stove.

Tsomo ladles noodles into his bowl and returns the bowl to him. Dele takes it.

DELE

Where is Lhadzom? Why didn't she return home?

TSOMO

Lhamo asked me for permission to let Lhadzom spend the night with her family. I gave permission.

DELE

Next time, don't let her spend the night at Gyatso's home or she'll want to spend every night there.

TSOMO

Okay.

INT. GYATSO'S HOME - NIGHT

A long piece of yak-hair cloth covers a stack of leather-covered boxes and a pile of stuffed leather bags. A flat wooden board rests atop the stack of boxes and leather bags. A *tangka* tied to a tent rope hangs over religious images and butter lamps on the board.

A milk separator, pots, and metal basins are in the upper corner of one side of the tent. A big chunk of butter wrapped in a yak stomach container rests on a wide flat rock next to a milk separator. Robes and dry yak dung are in each lower tent corner.

Dzebo sits on a sheepskin spread on top of dry willow stems stacked in a square shape on one side.

Drogon sits on Dzebo's lap and leans his head against Dzebo's chest. Lhamo and Lhadzom sit by Dzebo.

DZEBO

A long time ago, Mother Rabbit had several baby rabbits. One day, Mother Rabbit told the baby rabbits not to trust Mother Bear if she came to visit. When Mother Rabbit went to collect wild baby yams, Mother Bear knew Mother Rabbit was not home, so she went to the rabbit home.

LHADZOM

What's a bear?

DZEBO

A big, dangerous animal.

LHADZOM

Do bears eat people?

DZEBO

Yes, sometimes they eat small children.

Lhamo grabs Dzebo's arm and puts her head against Dzebo.

LHAMO

Did Mother Bear eat the baby rabbits?

DZEBO

Let me tell it.

Lhadzom looks at Dzebo, Drogon, and Lhamo and admires them as they move closer to their grandmother.

LHADZOM'S VOICE (V.O.)

My grandmother told me stories almost every night. I sat on her lap and listened to her stories. She told me stories when I cried after my brother bullied me or my parents slapped me. My grandmother said, 'Don't cry, my good girl.' When she had no sugar to give me, she would tell me stories to stop my crying. I hoped she would come back to life and tell me more stories, but she didn't. I miss her.

INT. LHADZOM'S HOME - DAY

Tsomo kneels just inside their family's tent and has a bowl of milk tea. Lhadzom sits cross-legged next to Tsomo.

TSOMO

Don't sit like a man.

LHADZOM

It's okay. I'm not an old woman.

TSOMO

You should learn to sit like a woman despite being a child.

Lhadzom stands and kneels on the ground.

TSOMO (CONT'D)

Good girl!

Lhadzom stands and then sits cross-legged.

LHADZOM

It is uncomfortable to sit the way women sit. It hurts my knees.

TSOMO

You have to get used to sitting like that. Others will laugh at you if you sit like a man when you are older.

LHADZOM

Oh.

LHADZOM (CONT'D)

Mother, do I have another grandmother?

TSOMO

Stupid girl. You have another grandmother. My mother is still alive.

LHADZOM

Why doesn't she live with us?

TSOMO

She lives with her family.

LHADZOM

Where is her family?

TSOMO

Her family is far from here.

LHADZOM

Do you miss your mother?

TSOMO (CONT'D)

Yes.

LHADZOM

Why doesn't she come to visit you?

TSOMO

She's old and can't come to see me. I will visit her.

LHADZOM

Take me with you when you visit your mother.

TSOMO

Okay.

LHADZOM

Does your mother have a lot of sugar crystals? Does she tell stories to children?

TSOMO

Yes, she does. She has a big bag of sugar.

Lhadzom smiles and jumps on Tsomo's lap.

LHADZOM

I want to visit my grandmother and listen to her stories. Please take me with you next time!

TSOMO

Okay.

LHADZOM

(ponders)

Will she give me candy?

TSOMO

(lightly striking Lhadzom's head)

Of course, she will give you a lot of candy. You are her granddaughter.

LHADZOM

Take me with you next time! I'll leave home if you don't take me with you next time!

TSOMO

(chuckling)

Okay.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Tsegon wears a new sheepskin robe and modern leather boots. He mounts a riding yak and bends over the yak's neck. Gangdron stands near the yak.

TSEGON

Are you going to marry Dawa?

GANGDRON

You know I want to marry you.

TSEGON

Why do you agree with your parents to marry Dawa?

GANGDRON

I can't say no to my parents. They consulted a lama who predicted I'd have a good life if I married Dawa.

TSEGON

We can secretly move to another tribe and get married.

Gangdron ponders for a second.

GANGDRON

Parents are powerful. Maybe we're not destined to marry each other.

Gangdron's entire face tenses with sadness, and tears fill her eyes.

Music.

Tsegon dismounts from the yak and wipes Gangdron's tears with his hand.

TSEGON (CONT'D)

Don't cry. I love you even though we can't marry.

Tsegon sighs.

EXT. GYATSO'S TENT YARD - SUNSET

Gangdron sits near her family's tent entrance and ponders. Tears fill her eyes.

Music.

EXT. LHADZOM'S FAMILY'S YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

Drashi is chasing Drogon. Drogon holds a catapult in his hand. Lhadzom chases Drashi and grabs his shoulder.

LHADZOM

Mother promised to take me with her to visit her mother next time.

DRASHI

Mother promised me too.

Drashi continues chasing Drogon. Lhadzom watches Drashi chase Drogon in the yak enclosure.

EXT. GANGDRON'S HOME - DAY

Gangdron is walking near her family's tent.

Lhadzom sees Gangdron and rushes over.

LHADZOM

(yells)

Cousin!

INT. GANGDRON'S HOME - DAY

Dzebo sits on her bed, and Gangdron sits near Dzebo with her head down. Dekyi sits near the stove.

Lhadzom stands at the door.

DEKYI

Come inside.

Lhadzom sits next to Gangdron.

DZEBO

Don't be sad.

DEKYI

What a bad woman! Be strong. The lama said you would have a happy marriage.

DZEBO

Right, what the lama says is correct. Marry Dawa, and you'll have a good life, as the lama predicted. Gyatso is kind to you and made the best decision for you. Belzang's a good man, so his son must be a good man. You'll have a good life if your husband is a good man.

DEKYI

Dawa's family is rich. You'll have a nice life if you marry into a rich family. You'll have a bad life if you marry into a poor family.

DZEBO

Dawa's family has many yaks, and it might be hard work for you to herd many yaks.

DEKYI

It's okay for her since she's young. What matters is to marry a good man. Listen to your stepfather.

DZEBO

Right. Listen to him. He cares about you, just like you were his own daughter. Gangdron nods and says nothing.

DEKYI

Gyatso said Dawa would come to our home in a few days.

No response from Gangdron.

DEKYI (CONT'D)

Lhadzom, your cousin, is a good woman. Right?

LHADZOM

Right. She's a good woman, and I like her.

DZEBO

Do you want to be a good girl like your cousin, Gangdron?

LHADZOM

Yes.

DEKYI

Good.

DZEBO

A good girl listens to her parents. Listen to your parents and you will become a good girl like your sister.

LHADZOM

(smiling)

Right.

A few days later

EXT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Twenty-year-old Dawa wears a new sheepskin robe with a sword in a silver sheath decorated with red corals hanging over his right hip from his sash. He wears a silver ring inset with three coral rings on his left ring finger.

He rides a black horse and heads to Gyatso's home.

Gyatso's watchdog barks as Dawa nears.

Gyatso and Dekyi emerge from their family's tent. Dekyi runs over, picks up a stone, and throws it at the dog. The dog stops barking. Gyatso holds Dawa's horse's reins and Dawa dismounts.

GYATSO

How are you?

DAWA

Good.

Gyatso ties the rein to a wood pole.

GYATSO

Go inside.

DEKYI

How are you?

DAWA

Good.

They enter the tent.

EXT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom peeks through a tent hole.

INT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Dawa and Gyatso sit next to each other on one side of the tent. Dekyi pours milk tea into a bowl and hands it to Gyatso, who gives it to Dawa.

GYATSO

Drink some tea.

Dawa takes it from GYATSO.

DAWA

Okay.

GYATSO

Dekyi, fix some food.

DAWA

Don't make food for me.

GYATSO

It's okay.

EXT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom runs to her home when Dawa discovers she is peeking through the tent.

EXT. GYATSO'S HOME - SUNSET

Gangdron stands near her family's tent door.

Dekyi comes out from the tent.

DEKYI

What a strange woman. Don't be shy. He's your husband.

Gangdron reluctantly follows Dekyi into the tent.

EXT. DELE'S TENT YARD - DAY

Lhadzom stands near her family's tent and watches Gangdron and Dawa riding horses. They are heading to Dawa's home.

A month later (Winter)

EXT. WINTER PASTURE - DAY

Black yak-hair tents are pitched on the banks of the Yellow River. Yaks, horses, and sheep graze around the tents. A creek flows down the valley near the tents.

EXT. WATER PASTURE - DAY

It is snowing, wrapping the landscape in a white coat.

Dogs can only bark at livestock.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

In his forties, the village LEADER wears a sheepskin robe and a fox-skin hat, rides a black horse, and heads to Dele's family tent.

Dele's family's watchdog barks furiously at the leader as he nears Dele's tent.

Dele emerges from his family tent, picks up a chunk of dry yak dung, and throws it at his dog. He walks toward the leader.

DELE

How are you, Leader?

LEADER

Good.

The leader stops his horse as Dele nears him.

LEADER

What a snowy day. I thought it wouldn't snow this morning.

DELE

Yeah, it snowed heavily.

LEADER

It's cold. Your family is rich. You should build a house. Rich families from our tribe live in houses.

DELE

We aren't rich. Dismount and have some hot tea with my family.

LEADER

No, thanks. I'm busy.

DELE

What are you busy doing?

LEADER

I'm here to inform you of a meeting the day after tomorrow at the end of Bear Valley. I have many households to inform today.

DELE

Okay. What's the meeting about?

LEADER

The government requires our tribe to send some children to school this autumn. We have to meet to discuss which children to send.

DELE

I see.

LEADER

You must join the meeting.

DELE

Okay.

LEADER

I'm going to inform other families.

INT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Dele wears a sheepskin robe and a fox-skin hat. He enters Gyatso's family tent.

Drogon and Lhamo are playing near their family's tent. They run into their family's tent when they see Dele enter.

Dzebo and Dekyi sit on one side of the tent.

DELE (CONT'D)

Where's Gyatso? Is he not going to join the meeting?

DEKYI

He went to Belzang's home yesterday. He hasn't returned.

DELE

Who'll join the meeting for your family? Dekyi, will you join the meeting?

DEKYI

No. It's shameful for women to join such meetings. Women don't have the right to decide for their families at meetings.

DELE

It's an important meeting. One of your family members should join. Gangdron, will you join?

GANGDRON

No. I have to herd my family's sheep and yaks.

Drogon and Lhamo stand by Dele.

DEKYI

You can take Drogon with you.

DROGON

No. I don't want to join the meeting. Old men will beat me.

Dele touches Drogon's head.

DELE

I won't let elders beat you. Nobody can bully you if I'm with you.

DROGON

(to Dekyi)

Put my robe on me.

Dekyi takes a small sheepskin robe from the lower part of the tent where the family's clothing is piled. She puts the robe on Drogon.

DEKYI

You're a real man. You can represent your father and join the meeting, my good son.

Dekyi kisses Drogon's forehead.

EXT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Dele mounts his horse, and Dekyi puts Drogon behind Dele. They ride the horse toward Bear Valley.

EXT. YELLOW RIVER BANKS - DAY

Men wear sheepskin robes. Some wear fox-skin hats. A few have their heads wrapped with scarves. They sit around the leader.

Their horses and riding yaks graze nearby.

The leader takes a pen and a greasy, rags notebook. He opens his notebook and holds the pen.

Drogon sits next to Dele.

LEADER

Okay, everybody, listen. A few days ago, I participated in a government meeting. Next month, the government leader requires each tribe to send at least four children to the local primary school. Who wants to send their children to school?

Everybody talks to each other.

TRINBO raises his hand.

TRINBO

I'm going to send my son to school.

LEADER

Good. What's your son's name?

TRINBO

Dongnyi.

The Leader writes "Dongnyi" in his notebook.

LEADER

Who else wants to send their children to school?

No one raises their hand.

LEADER

It seems no one wants to send their children to school. We'll have a lottery.

MAN 1

Good.

MAN 2

The leader's idea is the best.

MAN 3

It's fair.

LEADER

Whose family has an eight-year-old child?

The leader tears a paper from his notebook. He tears it into small pieces.

GURU

My daughter is eight years old.

NEKYAB

My son is eight years old.

DELE

My family's daughter is eight.

PAKBA

My son is eight.

BADKHO

My son is about eight, I guess.

TRINBO

My son is eight years old.

LEADER

Okay, I'll write each of your names on a piece of paper, except for Trinbo's.

The leader writes their names on the small pieces of paper.

The leader and those sitting near him fold the small pieces of paper into the same shape. The leader takes off his hat and puts the name papers inside. He shakes the papers in his hat.

LEADER

We're going to pick three papers from the hat. Each of those families will send a child to school. Do you all agree?

They all agree.

The person next to the leader picks a piece of paper from the hat and gives it to the leader.

The leader unfolds it.

LEADER

Badkho, you've been chosen. You need to send your son to school.

The leader puts his hat on the ground and takes his note and pen.

LEADER

What's your son's name?

BADKHO

Dorje.

The leader puts the notebook and pen on the ground and picks up his hat.
Another man next to him selects another paper.

LEADER

Dele. Your name. What's your daughter's name?

DELE

My daughter's name is Lhadzom.

Trinbo sits next to Dele.

TRINBO

Good. It's good for your daughter to go to school.

DELE

Right. She'll not learn much if she's as stupid as me.

Trinbo looks at Drogon.

TRINBO

Whose son is this?

DELE

He's Gyatso's son. Gyatso is not at home, so we came to join the meeting.

TRINBO

I didn't know that. How old are you?

DROGON

Seven.

TRINBO

What a good son! Brave enough to join the meeting.

DELE

Right. My family will build a house on the winter pasture this coming summer. Can you help me find construction workers?

TRINBO

Sure. I can ask the workers who built my house.

DELE

How much did you pay them?

TRINBO

Around 20,000 RMB. For a person as rich as you, it's a small sum.

DELE

I'm not rich. My family only has a few yaks, but others think my family's rich. You are a businessman, and you're rich. You sell ornaments and make a lot of money. Local people like ornaments.

TRINBO

Not really.

DELE

I also need your help choosing the kind of house to build since it will be my family's first house.

TRINBO

Don't worry. I'll tell the workers the type of house to build for your family.

DELE

Thanks. You're a capable man. You are good at everything.

Everyone mounts their horses and yaks and heads in different directions.

DELE

Don't forget to find workers for me.

TRINBO

Don't worry. I'll find workers for you.

DELE

Thanks.

INT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Badkho sits cross-legged next to Gyatso and sips milk tea from his bowl.

BADKHO

My wife's mother, Drala, doesn't want to send my son to school. You know he was chosen by lottery last year.

DZEBO

How is Drala?

BADKHO

Mother, Drala's good.

DZEBO

Great. Have some tea.

BADKHO

Mother, okay.

GYATSO

The government will fine your family if you don't send him to school.

BADKHO

But she doesn't agree. You know, old people are stubborn. It's impossible to persuade them to change their minds.

GYATSO

Why doesn't she want to send him to school?

BADKHO

She thinks other children will bully him. She's concerned he'll lack food and be hungry.

GYATSO

The school provides three meals each day. There's enough food. The teachers take good care of the children. There's no chance for them to bully each other. She thinks too much.

BADKHO

I told her, but she won't listen. She swore to the Three Jewels her grandchild would not attend school.

GYATSO

What shall we do?

BADKHO

Is it okay to send Drogon to school to represent Dorje?

DELE

Lhadzom doesn't want to go to school either. I asked the leader about sending Drashi to school to represent Lhadzom. He said it was okay.

GYATSO

That's okay.

BADKHO

Good. It's all we can do.

GYATSO

It's good that Drashi and Drogon will go to school together. They'll be less homesick if they are together.

BADKHO

Right.

EXT. GYATSO'S HOME - DAY

Badkho rides his horse toward his home.

Three months later (Spring)

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom squats at her family's tent entrance. Drashi runs from his family's yak enclosure.

Lhadzom grabs Drashi's arm as he enters his family's tent.

DRASHI

Let me enter!

Drashi hears his mother crying. He squats next to Lhadzom.

DRASHI (CONT'D)

(loudly)

What's happening?

LHADZOM

(quietly)

Father's angry. He's scolding Mother.

Drashi is quiet.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Tsomo and Dekyi sit near Dele's family yak enclosure.

DEKYI

What happened? Did he beat you?

TSOMO

No, we just quarreled. How do you know he beat me? Did Lhadzom tell you?

Dekyi looks at Tsomo's red, swollen cheek.

DEKYI

Yeah.

TSOMO

What a bigmouth girl.

DEKYI

Quarreling is normal. Every couple quarrels, but a husband beating his wife is no good.

TSOMO

It's okay if a husband beats his wife a few times. Often quarreling is depressing and makes me and my family sad. My biggest concern is that my mother would know my husband mistreats me, making her unhappy. Unhappiness brings illness to old people.

DEKYI

Understandable. Old people worry about their children's lives.

TSOMO

Don't talk about such sad things. Let's go to my home and have some tea.

DEKYI

No, thanks. I have to go home and fix something for my family's watchdog.

INT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Tsomo and Lhadzom sit in their family's tent.

TSOMO

Stupid girl. How often have I told you not to tell others about our family's private affairs?

LHADZOM

I didn't say anything to others.

TSOMO

Don't lie. You told Dekyi. Don't tell others if your father and I quarrel or he beats me. Rumors are powerful. They can destroy our family's reputation. Do you understand?

Tears fill Lhadzom's eyes.

TSOMO

I'll beat you if you tell others again about our private things.

Lhadzom keeps her head down and nods.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

SHEBO sits with Dele on one side of the tent. He throws his long ponytail over his back and smiles, showing a gold tooth.

SHEBO

Where's Lhadzom?

DELE

She's herding yaks. She doesn't want to go to school, so we ask her to herd our yaks.

TSOMO

She hates the very idea of school. She told us she preferred to herd yaks.

DELE

She was chosen to go to school by lottery, but she refused. Drashi is going to school in place of Lhadzom.

SHEBO

It's not good. She should go to school. Being a herdsman is not a good idea.

TSOMO

Poor girl! I urged her to attend school. I explained school life is far superior to herding life, but she didn't listen. She says she would miss home.

DELE

I can't convince her. She's not smart, like me. She wouldn't do well at school. Maybe it's best to let her herd yaks.

TSOMO

Women are unlucky. Maybe it is her fate not to attend school.

SHEBO

(sighs)

It's really bad.

TSOMO

We should leave today.

DELE

You can leave tomorrow. Let Shebo rest for a day.

TSOMO

It's better to leave today because Lhadzom wants to go with us. I promised to take her with me when I visited my mother.

SHEBO

Great. We can bring both Lhadzom and Drashi with us. I'm sure Mother will be happy to see them.

TSOMO

No. She's talkative and tells others whatever she sees. She doesn't know what things not to tell others. I'm afraid she'll tell my mother bad things and make her unhappy.

SHEBO

What bad things will make Mother unhappy?

TSOMO

(without answering his question)

She needs to herd our yaks.

Tsomo puts some fried bread into a plastic bag and wraps two bowls in a cloth.

SHEBO

No need to bring bowls and food. I packed food and plastic bowls on the horse.

TSOMO

We can bring some fried bread.

SHEBO

That's good.

Tsomo puts on a new sheepskin robe, a silver waist belt, and a red scarf.

Drashi brings a new sheepskin robe and stands next to Dele, who helps him put on the robe.

DELE

My family's horses are on the mountain. Tsomo and Drashi have no horse to ride.

SHEBO

She and Drashi can ride my other horse.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Dele puts the bread into a saddlebag.

Shebo folds one blanket, puts it over his riding horse's saddle, and puts a saddlebag over it. Tsomo puts another blanket over the other horse's saddle. Tsomo and Drashi mount the black horse. Shebo gets on the other horse.

SHEBO

We'll be back in six days.

DELE

Be careful on the way.

SHEBO

Okay.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom drives her family's yaks back home.

INT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom enters her family's tent.

LHADZOM

Father, where are Mother and Drashi?

DELE

Your uncle Shebo visited this morning. He's accompanying them to your grandmother's home.

LHADZOM

(cries out)

Mother lied! She promised to take me with her the next time she visited her mother! She doesn't love me. She loves Drashi. She didn't take me with her. I don't love Mother.

DELE

Of course, she loves you. You're her only daughter. She'll take you next time.

LHADZOM

(cries)

You always say, "Next time."

DELE

Don't cry. I'll ask her to take you with her next time. You must be hungry. Eat some fried bread. The tea is warm.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

Lhadzom sits on top of the mountain near her home. She sees two horse riders head toward her family's tent. She smiles and jumps up.

LHADZOM

Mother and Drashi are back.

INT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom enters the tent and sees Tsomo sitting on one side of the tent. She sits near Tsomo.

LHADZOM

(angry)

Liar! You promised I could visit Grandmother!

TSOMO

You were herding yaks, so I brought Drashi with me. I'll take you next time.

LHADZOM

No! I'll visit Grandmother when I grow up.

Tsomo hands a small package of crystal sugar to Lhadzom.

TSOMO

Grandmother loves you and sent you this package of crystal sugar.

Lhadzom nudges Tsomo's hand away.

LHADZOM

I don't need it.

Tsomo hands it to Lhadzom again.

LHADZOM (CONT'D)

No.

TSOMO

Okay, I'll give it to Drashi if you don't need it.

Lhadzom snatches it from Tsomo.

LHADZOM

Where are Father and Drashi?

TSOMO

They're visiting a neighbor.

INT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Dele makes a single-strap shoulder bag.

Months later (Summer)

INT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Drashi washes his face in a basin.

Dele puts a small notebook into a single-strap, cloth shoulder bag.

Tsomo helps Drashi put on his new sheepskin robe and puts the new school bag over his shoulder.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Dele mounts a white horse. Tsomo grabs Drashi's wrist with her hands and puts him behind Dele.

Gyatso and Drogon ride a horse and join Dele and Drashi.

GYATSO

Let's go.

DELE

Yeah.

TSOMO

Boys, try your best at school. Don't fight other children. You two should take care of each other. Bye.

DRASHI

Bye, Mother.

DROGON

Bye, Aunt (being polite).

DRASHI and Drogon nod. They head toward the township town.

EXT. DELE'S YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

Lhadzom gets on a riding yak and holds a slingshot.

She watches the horse riders while driving her family's yaks near her tent to a mountain.

Ten years later (Summer)

EXT. STONE YARD - DAY

People drive Gyatso's family's sheep into a small yard with stone walls.

Lhadzom, Tsomo, and Dekyi are lined up and block the opening. Gyatso and Dele catch sheep from the flock by their hind legs. They tie each sheep's front legs together and the front legs to the sheep's neck or horns. They put the tied sheep in a line and shear them.

DELE

These shears are dull. Is there another pair?

GYATSO picks up a pair of shears and hands them to Dele.

DELE

Your sheep are fat. You're a good shepherd.

GYATSO

This year the grass grew well, so the sheep are good.

DELE

You're like your father and herd sheep well.

GYATSO

I don't compare. He was the best shepherd in his tribe. I'm a bad shepherd. Did you know wolves killed four of my family's sheep a few days ago?

DELE

How's that possible?

GYATSO

Each time I fell asleep in the mountains.

DELE

Try your best to be a good shepherd like your father. Otherwise, you'll be ashamed.

GYATSO

(laughing)

I can't be as good a shepherd as my father.

WANGCHUK drives a motorcycle toward the stone yard. He is clad in a new fabric robe, with a scarf around his head that only exposes his eyes. He wears fabric shoes and a pair of jeans.

DEKYI

Who's that?

TSOMO

No idea.

Lhadzom wants to say something but makes no sound.

Wangchuk stops when he gets near them. He unwraps his scarf.

Lhadzom's face turns red.

GYATSO

Wangchuk, it's you. I didn't recognize you until you removed that scarf. What brings you here?

WANGCHUK

No purpose.

WANGCHUK gets off the motorcycle.

DELE

How are you?

WANGCHUK

Good.

WANGCHUK (CONT'D)

Give me a pair of shears. I'll help.

GYATSO

Go to my home and have some tea. My mother is at home.

WANGCHUK

No, thanks.

Wangchuk unties his sash. The whip he carries to protect against ferocious dogs falls at his feet. He walks in a circle like a disabled man.

Dekyi and Tsomo look at him and quietly chuckle.

Wangchuk folds up his robe and places it on the motorcycle. He takes a pair of shears near Gyatso and starts shearing.

GYATSO

Those aren't sharp.

WANGCHUK

A man has no strength when the blades are dull.

Dekyi and Tsomo whisper to each other.

TSOMO

Is his family rich?

DEKYI

No, his family's not rich. His mother is a single parent, and Wangchuk is her only child. He's my husband's friend and has visited our home several times.

TSOMO

I heard motorcycles are expensive. No one from our tribe bought a motorcycle. How could he have possibly bought it?

DEKYI

He borrowed money from his uncle.

Dele wipes sweat from his forehead and nose and sits on the ground.

DELE

Lhadzom, get some bowls and a kettle of tea. Don't warm the tea.

LHADZOM

Okay.

Lhadzom glances at Wangchuk as she walks home.

DELE

You two rest. It's hard work.

WANGCHUK

It's okay.

GYATSO

Okay.

Lhadzom places bowls on the ground and fills them with tea. She then joins Dekyi and Tsomo.

LHADZOM

You two have some cool tea. I won't let the sheep out of the yard.

TSOMO

Okay.

Dekyi and Tsomo join the three men.

Later, Wangchuk pours tea into a bowl, holds the bowl, and walks toward Lhadzom.

Wangchuk gives the bowl of tea to Lhadzom.

WANGCHUK

The sun is scorching. You must be thirsty. Have some cool tea.

Lhadzom takes it.

LHADZOM

You embarrass me. My parents are here.

WANGCHUK

It's okay.

Lhadzom pushes Wangchuk a little bit.

LHADZOM

Please join them.

Wangchuk reluctantly joins the others.

Wangchuk grabs a ram's hind leg; Gyatso helps him and grabs its horns. Gyatso pulls the sheep out of the yard as Wangchuk pushes the sheep from behind.

GYATSO

Are you sure you're going to ride the sheep? It's wild and will throw you to the ground.

WANGCHUK

I'm a real man. I'm not afraid of this sheep. I've ridden big yaks without reins. They could not throw me off.

GYATSO

Okay.

Gyatso grabs its horns tightly as Wangchuk gets on it. Gyatso releases it.

The sheep suddenly jumps and runs.

Wangchuk falls to the ground face down. He stands up and spits dirt and saliva.

Others howl with laughter.

Lhadzom lowers her head.

GYATSO (CONT'D)

I told him it was a wild one.

WANGCHUK

I was not ready when you released it. I didn't have time to grab its neck hair.

GYATSO

(laughs)

Ha-ha. You're not a real man. A sheep can throw you to the ground. No animal could throw me to the ground when I was your age.

DELE

What a boaster!

Tsomo and Dekyi gather wool together.

GYATSO

Lhadzom, can you drive the sheep into Golden Valley?

LHADZOM

Sure.

GYATSO

Let's go to my home and have lunch together.

DELE

Wangchuk, let's go.

WANGCHUK

I'll help Lhadzom drive the sheep into the valley.

DELE

It's okay. She can do that.

WANGCHUK

I have a motorcycle. She's tired, so she can ride with me on my motorcycle and return home.

DELE

Okay, be careful.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Lhadzom stands next to Wangchuk, who mounts his motorcycle.

LHADZOM

You embarrassed me today.

WANGCHUK

Don't worry. Sooner or later, they'll know about our relationship. Are you afraid your parents won't let you marry me?

LHADZOM

Not really, but there is a right time to let them know.

WANGCHUK

There is no right time. We get married, that's all.

LHADZOM

When will you take me to your home?

WANGCHUK

Right now.

LHADZOM

(shocked)

Impossible!

WANGCHUK

When will you be ready to go with me?

LHADZOM

Tomorrow my father and Gyatso will go to town to sell wool. Father will not be at home tomorrow night.

WANGCHUK

Okay. Get on my motorcycle.

Lhadzom gets on his motorcycle, and they go to Gyatso's home.

EXT. GYATSO'S HOME THE NEXT DAY

Gyatso, Dele, Wangchuk, and Dekyi pack big wool bundles on several yaks.

Gyatso and Dele mount horses.

GYATSO

We'll be back tomorrow.

DEKYI

Okay. Be careful on the way.

WANGCHUK

Be careful on the way.

They drive the yaks toward the township town.

INT. DELE'S HOME - NIGHT

Tsomo and Lhadzom sit on each side of the tent.

TSOMO

I hear you're dating Wangchuk. His family's not rich. You won't have a good life if you marry him. He borrowed money and bought a motorcycle. If you marry a man from a rich family, you'll have a better life.

LHADZOM

It's okay if his family is not rich. I'll marry him, not his family's property. We decided to marry. He promised that he'd never leave me.

TSOMO

Stupid woman! Don't you know what a man says is not reliable? At first, he'll probably be kind to you, but later, he'll treat you badly.

LHADZOM

He promised to treat me as well as he treats his mother.

TSOMO

Your father will find a good husband for you. You should listen to him. He'll make the right decision for you.

LHADZOM

No, I don't need my father to find a husband for me. I can find a good husband.

TSOMO

Stupid! Marriage is such an important thing in life. If you choose the wrong man, you'll have a miserable life and regret it.

LHADZOM

(with rising anger)

I'm stupid. I know you don't love me, and you don't care about me. You promised to take me to Grandmother's several times when I was a child, but you never did. You don't need to care about my business. I'm going to marry him!

TSOMO

I'm your mother, so I'm concerned about your marriage. Don't marry the wrong man, or you'll not have a good life. If you don't listen to your parents, others will think you are a bad woman.

LHADZOM

I don't care how others judge me. They are not my parents.

TSOMO

What a stupid woman! You'll lead a miserable life.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Wangchuk is standing on the river bank near Gyatso's family tent, looking into a small mirror and combing his black, short hair. He looks over at Lhadzom's tent after he finishes combing his hair.

INT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Tsomo drives her family's yaks back home and enters her family's tent. Dele sits on one side of the tent.

DELE

Where have you been?

TSOMO

I went to herd our family's yaks.

DELE

Where is Lhadzom?

TSOMO

She disappeared last night.

DELE

(shocked)

What's happened? Where could she have gone? Where can we find her?

TSOMO

Wangchuk took her to his family.

DELE

Lutso's son, Wangchuk?

TSOMO

Right.

DELE

(curious)

How do you know this?

TSOMO

She told me she was going to marry him.

DELE

Why didn't you tell me?

TSOMO

I thought they were just boyfriend and girlfriend. Last night, she told me she would marry him before we went to bed.

DELE

I'll bring her back tomorrow.

TSOMO

I tried to persuade her not to do this. She didn't listen. Maybe it's better to let her marry whomever she wants.

DELE

I want my daughter to marry a good man from a rich family. Wangchuk's family is not rich.

TSOMO

Maybe it's their fate to be husband and wife. We can't change it. Something tragic might happen if you try to separate them. Let them marry.

Dele takes some packages of salt, white sugar, and a pair of fabric shoes from a saddlebag. He gives sugar and salt to Tsomo and tosses the shoes to the back of the tent.

DELE

I bought these shoes for Lhadzom.

Next day

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

A saddled and bridled horse is tied to a post near Dele's home, waiting.

INT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

SODRAK sips milk tea and sits next to Dele.

SODRAK

Wangchuk brought your daughter to his home two days ago.

DELE

Yeah.

SODRAK

I hope you approve of the marriage.

DELE

I planned to ask my daughter to marry our leader's son, but she wanted to marry your nephew. We can't do anything. I won't let my daughter marry and live far from my family. If she moves away from this community, I will worry too much.

SODRAK

That's right.

TSOMO

I hope my daughter has a good life with your nephew's family.

SODRAK

Don't worry. I'll tell my nephew to take good care of your daughter and be kind to her. I'll be responsible if he beats her or is unkind.

TSOMO

Thanks.

Sodrak takes a *khadak* and a piece of silk cloth from his robe pouch and presents them to Dele. He accepts them, confirming he approves of the marriage.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

A few stuffed leather bags and a wooden box are stacked in the upper part of the tent. Religious images and butter lamps are on an altar made from earth and stones.

Lhadzom cuts meat into small pieces on a plate. She pours water into a pot, sets it on the stove, and adds small pieces of meat into the pot.

Lutso sits near Lhadzom. Lhadzom gives a folded robe to Lutso.

LHADZOM

Mother-in-law, lean against it and make yourself comfortable.

LUTSO

Okay.

Lutso takes it from Lhadzom, places it next to her, and leans against it.

Lhadzom takes the pot from the stove when the meat soup is cooked. She pours meat soup into a bowl and hands it to Lutso.

LHADZOM

Meat soup is nutritious and good for your cold. Is your head still painful?

Lutso takes the bowl.

LUTSO

Yes.

LHADZOM

You should see a doctor. I'll ask Wangchuk to take you to town. I'll herd the yaks.

LUTSO

No, I'm okay.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom stands at her family's tent entrance. Wangchuk looks into a small mirror, combing his hair on the small riverbank near their family's tent.

LHADZOM

(shouts)

Lunch is ready! Come and have lunch!

WANGCHUK

Okay.

Wangchuk puts the comb and mirror into a basin and walks to his home.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Wangchuk places the basin in the lower part of the tent and sits in his usual place. Lhadzom offers a bowl of meat soup to Wangchuk.

Wangchuk takes it from Lhadzom.

LHADZOM

You should take your mother to see a doctor. Her head is still painful.

WANGCHUK

It's okay. It's just a cold.

LUTSO

I don't need to see a doctor.

LHADZOM

Get some medicine for her.

WANGCHUK

I have to herd the yaks after lunch.

LHADZOM

I'll herd the yaks. You take her to see a doctor.

WANGCHUK

It's just a cold. It'll be better soon. Mother, I'll take you to the doctor if it's not better tomorrow.

LUTSO

No need to see a doctor.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

Lhadzom gets on Wangchuk's motorcycle. Wangchuk grabs the bar above the motorcycle's rear wheel, preventing it from falling over. Lutso stands near the tent and watches. She shakes her head.

Lhadzom releases the clutch, and the motorcycle moves forward suddenly. Wangchuk follows the motorcycle, clutching the bar above its rear wheel to prevent it from falling. The motorcycle falls over, and Lhadzom falls to the ground. Wangchuk also falls to the ground, his foot caught under the motorcycle. Wangchuk pushes the motorcycle with his other foot to release his other foot from under the motorcycle.

Wangchuk limps around the motorcycle as Lhadzom stands up.

LHADZOM

What happened to your foot?

WANGCHUK

(groans)

The motorcycle hurt it.

LHADZOM

Let me have a look.

Wangchuk sits and takes off his shoe and sock. There's no injury mark.

LHADZOM

Not serious.

Wangchuk puts his shoe and sock back on. He walks unstably.

They lift the motorcycle. The glass on the front light and one rear mirror are broken.
Wangchuk gets on the motorcycle.

LHADZOM (CONT'D)

Your foot is injured. You rest at home, and I'll drive our family yaks from the mountain - no more practicing. Your mother is still watching us. Probably she's mad at me.

WANGCHUK

Okay.

Wangchuk drives the motorcycle home.

Lhadzom walks toward a riding yak tied near their family's tent.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Wangchuk takes a piece of broken glass from the motorcycle.

Lutso squints at Wangchuk.

Wangchuk glances at Lutso's gloomy, angry face in the motorcycle's rear mirror.

LUTSO

(with a little anger)

Broke again. What a strange wife! She's the only woman who drives a motorcycle. It's not a good omen.

WANGCHUK

She won't need to ask me to drive her to visit her parents if she can drive a motorcycle. She can also drive a motorcycle to visit her grandmother. I promised her several times to take her to visit her grandmother but never did.

LUTSO

You're a bad man. You can't control your wife. She'll become the family authority and manipulate you. It will shame you. Other families' daughters-in-law work hard and rarely visit their parents' homes. Your wife often visits her parents' home. Don't let her often visit her parents' home.

WANGCHUK

Mother, don't overthink. She just wants to learn to drive motorcycles. Visiting her parents is not a bad thing. She misses her parents.

LUTSO

You can't let her drive a motorcycle again. I will leave the family if you let her drive the motorcycle again. She'll destroy our family's reputation if she drives a motorcycle.

WANGCHUK

(shaking his head)

Stop talking. I won't let her drive a motorcycle.

Wangchuk enters the tent.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - NIGHT

Wangchuk sits on one side of the tent, and Lutso and Lhadzom sit on the other. Wangchuk pours iodine on a small piece of cotton from a small box. He puts the wet cotton around his swollen foot.

LUTSO

(to Lhadzom)

Don't drive a motorcycle. Your leg will be broken if you fall on the ground from the motorcycle. Wangchuk can drive the motorcycle. He will take you wherever you want to go.

LDADZOM

If I can drive a motorcycle, I don't need to ask Wangchuk when I want to go somewhere.

LUTSO

It's not a good idea. I heard about a man from another tribe whose leg was broken in a motorcycle accident. You will be tortured for your whole life if your leg is broken.

WANGCHUK

You should listen to the person who cares about you.

LHADZOM

You are right. I should listen to others' suggestions. Otherwise, I'll get in trouble.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lutso wears a new shirt and robe, puts on a new pair of shoes, and ties a silver belt to the sash.

Wangchuk starts the motorcycle. Lutso gets on behind Wangchuk, who drives to town.

EXT. CLINIC

Brick rooms are in a row in a small yard. A doctor in his fifties fetches water from a well in the yard and heads toward a room.

INT. CLINIC - DAY

Boxes of medicine are on a shelf, and a metal stove is in the room center. A bunch of papers is on a table near the window. The doctor sits at the table, holds Lutso's wrist, and checks her pulse. She sits on a four-legged wooden stool next to the doctor. Wangchuk stands next to his mother.

DOCTOR

Don't worry. You've got a cold. I'll give you some medicine. Take it, and you'll soon recover.

LUTSO

Okay, thanks!

The DOCTOR gives a few boxes of medicine to Lutso.

WANGCHUK

How much?

DOCTOR

Thirty-two.

Wangchuk gives thirty-two RMB to the doctor.

WANGCHUK

Here you go. Thanks!

Wangchuk and Lutso walk to the door.

WANGCHUK (CONT'D)

We're leaving.

DOCTOR

Be careful on the way.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - NIGHT

Lutso swallows some pills.

LHADZOM

What did the doctor say?

LUTSO

The doctor said I would get better if I took medicine.

WANGCHUK

I told you she just had a common cold.

LHADZOM

Great that it's not serious.

LUTSO

Yeah.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

Lhadzom carries a basket on her back. She bends over while collecting fresh yak dung patties from the ground with her hand, and tosses them into the basket. She shuffles slowly, carrying the basket full of yak dung.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Wangchuk and Lutso sit on each side of the tent and have tea.

WANGCHUK

Mother, can you herd yaks today? I want to take Lhadzom to participate in a religious rite.

LUTSO

Young people don't like to chant and don't pay attention to what the lama says. I'll attend.

WANGCHUK

You know she's been pregnant for a month. It's good for the unborn baby if she joins the rite.

LUTSO

You can take her next time.

WANGCHUK

(reluctantly)

Okay.

EXT. MONASTERY - DAY

Locals gather in front of a temple and piously chant scriptures and mantras.

Lutso sits next to TSOYAG.

TSOYAG

How's your daughter-in-law?

LUTSO

She's strange. She asked Wangchuk to teach her to drive a motorcycle.

TSOYAG

How brave! I don't dare drive a motorcycle.

LUTSO

It's not good for a woman to drive a motorcycle. None of the herdswomen from our town drive a motorcycle. She'll become notorious.

(Autumn)

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Tsomo combs her long hair on the small river bank.

Lhadzom sits near her and watches Tsomo combing her hair.

LHADZOM

Lutso's a bad woman.

Tsomo stops combing her hair and stares at Lhadzom.

TSOMO

Why? Did she treat you badly?

LHADZOM

Not really.

TSOMO

Are you unkind to her?

LHADZOM

I tried my best to take good care of her. But she thinks I'm a horrible wife who controls her husband. She tells good things about me when I am with her, but she tells bad things about me when she is with others.

TSOMO

Don't worry about what she thinks. Older people with nothing to do often judge others.

LHADZOM

It hurts me. I can't bear it.

TSOMO

Face it. It's what you chose. Never think about divorce. Think about your unborn baby. The baby will be happy if its parents live together. Tomorrow, Wangchuk will pick you up. You should go with him. Try your best, and everything will be okay.

Tsomo resumes combing her hair.

Lhadzom looks into the water and studies her reflection.

LHADZOM'S VOICE (V.O.)

My mother is unlike other mothers who want their children to have a happy life. She wants me to live with that ruthless old woman, Lutso. She wants me to suffer for the rest of my life. Maybe she doesn't love me. Mother promised to do me a favor when I was a child, but she didn't. Maybe I shouldn't love her; maybe I should hate her.

EXT. DELE'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom gets on Wangchuk's motorcycle. Tsomo and Dele stand nearby. Wangchuk starts the engine.

DELE

Drive carefully.

TSOMO

Bye.

Wangchuk drives away. Dele enters their tent.

Tsomo stands and watches them drive away.

A few days later.

INT. INPATIENT WARD - DAY

There are two cots in the room. Tsomo lies on the cot next to the widow. A blanket covers her lower body, and her upper body lies against a folded blanket placed on her pillow. Dele sits on a stool next to Tsomo.

Tsomo looks at the IV bottle hanging over the holder beside her cot.

DELE

It'll finish soon. Is your hand painful?

Tsomo glances at the back of her hand, where a needle transfers liquid into a vein.

TSOMO

No more pain. It was painful at the beginning.

DELE

Good.

TSOMO

Put some yak dung into the stove. I feel so cold, even covered by blankets. Do you feel cold?

Dele stands and walks over to the stove in the middle of the room. He puts some yak dung into the stove.

DELE

It's warm inside the room. You've got a fever and feel cold.

EXT. CLINIC -DAY

Wangchuk parks his motorcycle near the clinic gate and walks into the yard.

INT. INPATIENT WARD - DAY

Wangchuk and Tsomo sit on stools near the stove. Dele sits on the cot.

WANGCHUK

What did the doctor say?

TSOMO

Not serious. A cold.

DELE

It'll be okay after taking drugs and giving injections. This is our third day in the clinic. The doctor said we could go home after he gives another two IV bottles tomorrow.

WANGCHUK

That's great. Who is herding your family's yaks?

TSOMO

Gyatso is herding my family's yaks. How's Lhadzom?

WANGCHUK

She's good. I asked her to come with me today, but she didn't. She asked me to visit you.

TSOMO

It's okay since you came. There's no reason for her to come with you. She must be busy. It's good that she stays at home since she's pregnant.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom is cutting meat into small pieces on a plate. She stops working and touches her big belly.

AHP #65 ལྷོག་ལམ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལམ། Gu ru 'phrin las
Lutso kneads dough in a basin near Lhadzom. She looks at Lhadzom.

LUTSO

Are you in pain? Rest. I'll cut the meat.

LHADZOM

I'm okay. I can do it.

INT. INPATIENT WARD - DAY

Dele and Tsomo sit on the stool near the stove.

DELE

What a bad woman. She didn't visit her mother when her mother was seriously ill.

TSOMO

She must be busy.

DELE

No matter how busy she was, she should come visit you when you are seriously ill.

TSOMO

(pondering)

Maybe she is still mad at me. I scolded her the last time she came home.

DELE

Why did you scold her?

Tsomo doesn't say anything.

EXT. DELE'S FAMILY YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

Wangchuk is standing near Lhadzom, who is tethering a yak.

WANGCHUK

Your mother was seriously ill. You should visit her. She will return home tomorrow.

LHADZOM

She will not die from a cold. She doesn't love me. Why should I care about her?

WANGCHUK

Of course, your mother loves you. You can't say your mother doesn't love you just because she didn't keep her word or scolded you. We can visit her tomorrow.

Lhadzom and Wangchuk walk toward their family's yak enclosure gate.

Months later (Winter)

EXT. DELE'S HOUSE - DAY

Dele and Tsomo greet Wangchuk and Lhadzom.

EXT. DELE'S HOUSE - DAY

A small adobe house with a window in a wooden frame and a wooden door.

INT. DELE'S HOUSE - DAY

Boxes and stuffed leather bags are piled on one side of the house against a wall. Religious images, lamps, and seven copper bowls are on a small table in the upper corner. Bowls and glasses are on a shelf on the other side of the room. Kitchen utensils are next to the shelf. A metal stove is in the center of the room.

Wangchuk and Dele sit on a mat on one side of the room. Lhadzom sits near the stove on the other side of the room. Tsomo washes bowls in a basin near Lhadzom.

EXT. DELE'S HOUSE - DAY

Wangchuk mounts his motorcycle, puts the key in the ignition, starts the engine, and drives off.

DELE

Drive safe.

WANGCHUK

Okay, bye.

DELE

Bye.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - NIGHT

Lutso touches her knees and stretches her legs on one side of the tent.

LUTSO

My knees hurt. I herded our yaks on foot. I can't herd animals anymore.

WANGCHUK

Mother, you should ride the riding yak.

LUTSO

I felt sorry for the yak. My daughter-in-law needs to care for the child after she gives birth. I can't help you herd the yaks.

WANGCHUK

Don't worry, Mother. I'll sell the yaks, and we'll move to town. We won't need to herd anymore. We'll have a happy town life.

LUTSO

How can we survive in town?

WANGCHUK

Don't worry. I have a lot of ideas about how to make a living in town.

Lutso touches her knees and moans.

EXT. DELE'S FAMILY'S HOUSE YARD - NIGHT

A small white tent is pitched in the yard.

INT. WHITE TENT - NIGHT

Lhadzom lies on a mattress covered with her robe in the middle of the tent. She groans in pain.

Lhadzom gives birth to a baby boy. Tsomo cuts the umbilical cord with a small knife. Tsomo wraps the baby gently in a smooth wool cloth. She pours lukewarm yak milk into a new nursing bottle and nurses the baby.

INT. DELE'S HOME - NIGHT

Tsomo holds the baby in her arms and enters the house.

Dele takes a holy scripture wrapped in yellow cloth from a wooden box and places it beside his family's shrine table in the upper right corner. He holds the scripture over the baby and lightly touches it to the baby's head.

EXT. DELE'S HOME – THE NEXT DAY

Tsomo holds the nursing bottle and runs out of the house. Lhadzom carries the baby in her robe and sits on the back of Wangchuk's motorcycle. Dele stands near them. Tsomo gives the nursing bottle to Lhadzom.

TSOMO

You forgot the bottle. Sometimes, feed your breastmilk to the baby. It's good for the baby.

LHADZOM

Okay.

DELE

Bye.

WANGCHUK

Bye.

Wangchuk drives away.

EXT. NEIGHBOURHOOD - DAY

Snow covers everything. Only a few tents remain like black spots on white paper in the neighborhood.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Wangchuk holds the baby on his lap. Lhadzom sits by him.

LHADZOM

Our family should build a house this year, or our son, Ngakwang, will freeze. Most families in our community have houses.

WANGCHUK

Not necessary. We can sell our family's yaks. We'll move to town next year. I've already decided to buy a house from a friend in town.

LHADZOM

Sell the yaks? How will we survive in town?

WANGCHUK

We'll run a small shop.

LHADZOM

I don't know any math.

WANGCHUK

It's okay. I know basic math.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S YAK ENCLOSURE - DAY

Lhadzom and Wangchuk drive a bunch of yaks out of their family's yak enclosure. Trinbo and his friend mount their horses and drive the yaks away.

TRINBO

Bye.

WANGCHUK

Bye.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lutso nurses the baby on one side of the tent. Wangchuk sits on the other side.

WANGCHUK

I sold a few yaks. The price was pretty good. Trinbo said he'd buy our family's female yaks this summer.

LUTSO

I want to sell all the female yaks as free-life yaks.

WANGCHUK

Free-life yaks sell for less.

LUTSO

It's okay. I don't want our female yaks slaughtered. They offer us dairy products. We can't let others kill them.

WANGCHUK

Ridiculous! Some businessmen bought yaks from others as free-life yaks and then sold them to Muslims to slaughter.

LUTSO

I still want to sell the female yaks as free-life yaks; otherwise, I won't sell them. Trinbo is a good man. He's not the type to forget a promise.

WANGCHUK

If you don't sell them, you herd them alone. We want to move to town.

LUTSO

Okay. That's better than selling them as free-life yaks.

WANGCHUK

What a stubborn old woman. Okay, I'll sell the yaks as free-life yaks to Trinbo.

LUTSO

You are sinful! You just sold our family's male yaks to Trinbo. He'll sell them to Muslims to slaughter. How sinful!

WANGCHUK

Ommanibemehum

LUTSO

Ommanibemehum. May all male yaks go to Heaven after they're killed.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S HOUSE YARD - DAY

Wangchuk gets on his motorcycle and starts the engine.

Lhadzom walks to him from the yak enclosure.

WANGCHUK

I'm going to town. I'll buy the house from my friend. We can move to town after selling the female yaks this autumn.

LHADZOM

Okay. Buy a package of milk powder and some bottle nipples for Ngakwang.

WANGCHUK

Okay. Should I buy anything else?

LHADZOMN

Maybe. Does Mother-in-law need something?

WANGCHUK

I already asked her. I'll be back today.

LHADZOM

Drive carefully. Don't drive too fast.

WANGCHUK

Okay.

Wangchuk drives away.

Months later (Autumn)

EXT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom brings a pot of flour soup to her family's watchdog. The watchdog lies on the ground and doesn't raise its head as Lhadzom approaches. Lhadzom looks into the basin near the dog. It's full of leftover food. Lhadzom brings the pot of flour soup back into the tent.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lutso puts pieces of butter into a kettle and places the kettle on the stove.

LHADZOM

Our family's dog didn't eat the food I offered this morning. He's ill.

LUTSO

No. He's old and losing his appetite.

LHADZOM

Poor dog.

LUTSO

All animals are the same. They lose their appetite when they get old. Old people only eat a small amount of food and feel full.

LHADZOM

Right.

INT. OFFERING INCENSE- SUNSET

Bits of juniper, colorful pieces of silk, roasted barley, and a big piece of butter are smoldering on an altar piled with pebbles at the back of Wangchuk's family's tent. Wangchuk circles the altar and tosses wind horses into the air. Wind horses flutter in the air in thick smoke.

WANGCHUK

... Deity xx, Diety xx, ...

Escort me when I go somewhere, greet me when I come back.

Protect my family and prevent them from getting ill. Empower me and ensure everything goes as I wish. ... Deity xx, Deity xx, ...

When I call you three times, come see me three times at the speed of lightning.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

A truck stops near Wangchuk's family tent.

Wangchuk and the truck DRIVER fold up the family tent. Lhadzom packs their family belongings into big bags. The stuffed bags are loaded on the truck.

Lutso carries Ngakwang inside her robe and sits against a big bag.

Wangchuk, the TRUCK DRIVER, and Lhadzom load the tent and other bags onto the truck.

They finish loading and sit on the ground.

WANGCHUK

They'll be here soon.

TRUCK DRIVER

No, worries. The road's good. It'll take about one hour to get to town from here.

Lhadzom pours tea from a kettle into two bowls and offers them to Wangchuk and the TRUCK DRIVER.

TRUCK DRIVER

(sips the tea)

This is good.

Trinbo and his two friends approach, each riding a horse toward Wangchuk. Trinbo and his friends arrive.

TRINBO

Sorry, we're late.

WANGCHUK

It's okay. We just finished loading the truck. Please dismount and have some tea.

TRINBO

No, thanks.

Trinbo and his friends drive the yaks away.

Wangchuk unchains his family's watchdog, puts the chain into a bag, and puts the bag on the truck.

LHADZOM

Shall we put the dog in the truck?

WANGCHUK

No, leave him here. He's old and has lost his mind. It's better he's a stray dog.

LHADZOM

What a miserable person! You don't have a compassionate heart. He'll starve to death.

WANGCHUK

Don't worry. He'll find something to eat. He's lost his mind. We can't take him with us. He'll die soon.

Lutso gets on the truck with Ngakwang. Wangchuk and Lhadzom get on the motorcycle. They drive toward town.

Music

The old dog wanders around where the family's tent had been. Smoke rises from the ground where the family's stove had been. The truck and motorcycle head toward the township town. Trinbo and his friends drive the yaks in the opposite direction.

Five years later

EXT. TOWN - DAY

A road divides the town into two sections. Cars and motorcycles pass on the street. Dogs search for food among garbage piles. Some pack yaks and horses are tied to an electrical pole.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S HOUSE BACKYARD - DAY

Lutso sits in an armchair in the back of her family's home. She spins a prayer wheel in her right hand and holds prayer beads in the other hand.

The prayer wheel almost falls to the ground as she dozes.

INT. WANGCHUK'S SHOP - DAY

Belzang enters the shop.

Lhadzom stands behind a display case in the shop.

LHADZOM

How are you, Uncle? (An honorific.)

BELZANG

Good. How's business?

LHADZOM

Not good. How's Gangdron doing?

BELZANG

She's doing good.

LHADZOM

I haven't seen her for months. I miss her.

BELZANG

I'll ask her to visit you next time.

LHADZOM

That's really good.

BELZANG

Give me a package of detergent, a box of matches, and three packages of salt.

Lhadzom walks into one corner and searches for detergent and salt behind a display case.

LHADZOM

No salt and detergent. Sold out. We decided to buy more supplies from the county town shops. Wangchuk often delays going there. Lhadzom hands a box of matches to Belzang.

Belzang takes it and points at a package of candies on a shelf.

BELZANG

Give me two packages of that candy.

Lhadzom gives him two packages of candy. Belzang takes them from Lhadzom and gives her 100 RMB.

Lhadzom presses buttons on a calculator and gives change to Belzang.

BELZANG (CONT'D)

Town life must be good.

LHADZOM

Herding life is better. It's boring in town. Time passes so slowly.

BELZANG

We herders admire people who live in town. They don't need to herd yaks in harsh weather and can always rest at home.

LHADZOM

Township life is not as joyful as you think.

BELZANG

Okay. I'm leaving.

Lhadzom walks to the small door inside the shop.

LHADZOM

Come inside. We live in this room. Have some tea.

BELZANG

No, thanks. I've got to return home early.

LHADZOM

Be careful on the way.

BELZANG

Okay.

INT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lutso sits on a cot near the window with a bowl of rice and meat with vegetables.

Wangchuk sits on a stool near the stove. Lhadzom sits on a stool and hands a bowl of food to Wangchuk.

WANGCHUK

Don't miscalculate next time.

LHADZOM

Is something wrong? I got the same results on the calculator twice.

LUTSO

Each time you miscalculated. We can't make money this way.

WANGCHUK

You gave fifteen RMB too much to Belzang. We lost money on this transaction.

LHADZOM

I told you my math was poor and asked you to operate the shop. You often wander off with your friends, ignoring business.

WANGCHUK

(angrily)

Shut up!

They are all silent and eat.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

GANGTSO, in her early thirties, wears gold earrings, a gold necklace, a new fabric robe, and an apron. She sits next to Lhadzom. They share a table near the window.

There are tables and stools in the restaurant. A big metal stove is in the center of the room. A big pot and kettles are on the stove. A display case with various beverages is in a corner near a door that leads to a small room that serves as a kitchen.

Gangtso holds the thermos from the table and refills Lhadzom's cup.

LHADZOM

Thanks. Cousin.

Lhadzom looks at Gangtso's gold necklace and touches it.

LHADZOM

What a beautiful necklace! I admire your life. You can make money and buy whatever you want.

GANGTSO

It's hard to earn money as a single woman. Couples cooperate and make a lot of money.

LHADZOM

It's better to live alone than live with a bad husband. A bad husband gambles or wastes the money earned by his wife.

GANGTSO

Living with a man is better than living alone.

LHADZOM

I imagine living alone is better than living with a bad mother-in-law who often criticizes her daughter-in-law no matter how kind the daughter-in-law is to her.

Gangtso says nothing and looks out the window.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A man in his fifties holds a beer bottle in his hand and stumbles across the road. One end of his red sash drags on the ground.

A young man drives a motorcycle fast and almost hits him.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

GANGTSO

What a crazy young man. Almost hit him.

LHADZOM

That man is so pitiful. Each time he quarrels with his wife, he drinks heavily.

GANGTSO

He and his wife are in their fifties. They should stop quarreling. Quarreling solves no problems.

LHADZOM

Right. Quarreling ruins the family's happiness.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The man swigs beer from the bottle as he crosses the road.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Two young men ride a motorcycle. They stop their motorcycle at the door of the restaurant.

They dismount and read "GOLDEN TOWN DUMPLING RESTAURANT" in big letters above the restaurant, written on a wooden board.

They enter the restaurant.

Gangtso stands up as the young men sit at a table near the stove. She takes a kettle from the stove and two paper cups from the display case. She offers tea to the young men.

Gangtso looks at one man wearing a cap. He seems younger than the other.

GANGTSO

What are you going to eat?

The younger man looks at the other.

YOUNGER MAN

What shall we eat?

The older man looks at Gangtso.

OLDER MAN

What do you offer?

GANGTSO

We only offer dumplings.

OLDER MAN

Okay. Thirty dumplings for us.

The older man looks at the younger one.

OLDER MAN

Is thirty enough for us?

YOUNGER MAN

It's enough. We can order more later if it's not enough.

Gangtso walks to the kitchen.

LHADZOM

Cousin, I'm leaving.

GANGTSO

Okay. Come chat with me if you have time.

LHADZOM

Okay.

The younger man watches Gangtso walk out the door. The younger man sips tea and looks at the older man.

YOUNGER MAN

What a happy woman! Only she wears such a big gold necklace in our town.

OLDER MAN

Why are you sure she's happy?

YOUNGER MAN

If you have a gold necklace, aren't you happy? You never had a gold necklace, so you don't know owning precious adornments makes you happy.

OLDER MAN

It sounds like you have a lot of precious stuff, but you don't. Gold necklaces are just metal chains. I don't think they are valuable.

The younger man chuckles.

YOUNGER MAN

You can't afford Gangtso's gold necklace, even if it's just a metal chain.

The older man says nothing and sips tea.

INT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ngakwang checks as Lhadzom presses buttons on the calculator.

Lhadzom sits on a stool. Her elbows are on the table where the calculator is.

NGAKWANG

You pressed the wrong button again.

Ngakwang points to the plus button.

NGAKWANG (CONT'D)

This is a plus button.

Ngakwang points to the minus button.

NGAKWANG (CONT'D)

This is a minus button.

LHADZOM

Okay. Sometimes I am confused by these buttons and make mistakes.

NGAKWANG

Try again. Twenty-minus-six is what?

Lhadzom calculates.

LHADZOM

Twenty-six.

NGAKWANG

No, you pressed the wrong button.

Ngakwang gets on Lhadzom's lap.

NGAKWANG (CONT'D)

Mother, I'm tired.

LHADZOM

Teach me for ten more minutes. I'll give you a cola and biscuits then.

Ngakwang smiles.

Lhadzom enters the adjoining shop room and brings a bottle of cola and a small pack of biscuits. Lhadzom presses buttons on the calculator. Ngakwang drinks cola and eats biscuits. Lutso sits on the cot and dozes.

EXT. STREET ROAD - DAY

A small white car moves down the dirt road dividing the small town into two sections. It parks near Wangchuk's shop entrance. The driver toots the horn.

The driver is thirtyish, a local female government clerk, and clad in a white shirt and blue jeans. As Lhadzom emerges from the shop, the driver rolls down the passenger seat window and lifts her dark sunglasses above her nose.

CLERK

Is your husband at home?

LHADZOM

No.

CLERK

Okay.

LHADZOM

Come in and have some tea.

CLERK

No, thanks. When will he be back?

LHADZOM

I don't know.

CLERK

That's okay. We're recruiting street sweepers. We offer good pay. Are you interested?

LHDZOM

I don't know. I have to ask my husband. I can't make any decision without asking him.

CLERK

Discuss with your husband once he's back, and let me know.

LHADZOM

Okay. Come in and have tea.

CLERK

No, thanks. I'm busy.

Lhazdom watches as the car drives away. Lutso comes out and joins Lhadzom.

LUTSO

Who was that?

LHADZOM

A government clerk. I don't know her name.

LUTSO

What did she say?

LHADZOM

She asked me if I wanted to be a street sweeper.

LUTSO

(chuckles)

Only poor people are street sweepers. If you are a street sweeper, others will think our family is very poor.

LHADZOM

Right.

They watch dogs gnawing on bones around garbage scattered on both sides of the road.

LHADZOM

What a lucky woman!

LUTSO

Who?

LHADZOM

That government clerk. She has a good job and can drive anywhere she wants. She doesn't have to ask her husband to drive her. I also want to learn to drive like her.

Lutso scowls at Lhadzon and goes back into the shop.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom opens the door of Wangchuk's car. Wangchuk stands next to Lhadzom.

LHADZOM

Give me the key. I'm going to practice driving.

WANGCHUK

You have already learned how to drive.

LHADZOM

Not really. Give me the key.

INT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lutso sits on the cot and watches Wangchuk and Lhadzom.

LUTSO

What a crazy woman!

EXT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

WANGCHUK

Mother will scold me if she discovers I let you drive the car.

LHADZOM

She always scolds you and me. Let her scold us.

Wangchuk hands Lhadzom the key.

Lhadzom drives away.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY HOUSE YARD - DAY

The car's front bumper is damaged. Wangchuk inspects the damage.

WANGCHUK

How did you damage it?

LHADZOM

I didn't see a big rock on the road.

Wangchuk gets in the car.

WANGCHUK

I'll go fix it. Mother will scold us if she discovers it.

Ngakwang comes from the house and looks at the car's broken part.

NGAKWANG

Mother, you damaged the car again?

LHADZOM

Don't tell your grandmother.

Ngakwang nods.

NGAKWANG

Father, I want to go with you.

WANGCHUK

No, stay at home and do your homework.

NGAKWANG

I don't have any homework.

WANGCHUK

Don't lie to me!

Ngakwang angrily rushes into the house.

INT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lutso squints at Lhadzom.

LUTSO

(angrily)

Women shouldn't drive cars. Do you know any woman who drives a car in our community? You damaged the car again. Wangchuk doesn't have much money to fix the car each time you damage it.

Lhadzom cleans the kettle on the stove.

LHADZOM

(angrily)

What's wrong with me driving a car? You aren't a queen and can't order me to follow you. I'm not your family's slave. Don't treat me like a slave. You can ask your son to divorce me if you don't want to live with me.

Lutso looks at Lhadzom's face and doesn't say anything.

Lhadzom walks into the shop room after cleaning the kettle.

INT. WANGCHUK'S SHOP ROOM - DAY

Lhadzom puts her elbow on the display case and ponders.

Ngakwang enters the shop room.

NGAKWANG

Mother, I want to drink a cola.

LHADZOM

What a bigmouth boy! Like a girl. I'll beat you if you report on me again.

Ngakwang looks at Lhadzom's angry face and returns to the living room.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY HOUSE YARD - DAY

Tsoyag sits on a stool by Lutso, who sits in an armchair.

LUTSO

Wangchuk is a bad man. He doesn't listen to me. Instead, he listens to his crazy wife.

TSOYAG

A bad wife makes her husband a bad man.

LUTSO

He lets his wife drive the car. Others say Lhadzom dominates Wangchuk. This destroys his and our family's reputation.

TSOYAG

Only crazy women drive cars and motorcycles. It's horrible for a woman to drive motorcycles and cars. You should tell Wangchuk to stop Lhadzom from driving.

LUTSO

He's bad. He doesn't listen to me anymore.

INT. WANGCHUK'S SHOP ROOM - DAY

A young policeman and an older policeman enter the shop. They check the dates on small packages of snacks in the display case.

A policeman points to several packages of snacks.

OLDER POLICEMAN

These are expired. You can't sell snacks with expired dates. We're going to take them.

LHADZOM

(puzzled)

Okay. I don't know much about date expirations.

YOUNG POLICE

Do you have more of these snacks?

LHADZOM

No.

OLDER POLICEMAN

We're going to confiscate all these expired snacks.

The young policeman puts the snacks into a big bag. They leave.

INT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Wangchuk sits on a stool near the stove next to Lhadzom. Lutso and Ngakwang sleep on a cot near the window.

WANGCHUK

I told you not to buy those snacks.

LHADZOM

Children like snacks.

WANGCHUK

You don't make money. Instead, you lose money.

LHADZOM

You operate the shop from now on. I'm not going to operate the shop anymore. We'll see how you support your family.

WANGCHUK

I don't care. It's up to you.

LHADZOM

I told you we shouldn't move to town. We don't know how to support ourselves in town. You said we would run a business, and you would operate it. Now, you wander everywhere like a stray dog.

Wangchuk slaps Lhadzom. Lutso and Ngakwang wake up and raise their heads.

LUTSO

What's wrong?

WANGCHUK

Nothing's wrong.

LUTSO

Don't quarrel.

WANGCHUK

(angrily)

Shut up! Go to bed.

Silence.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S SHOP - DAY

Wangchuk gets in the car.

Lhadzom comes out of the shop and walks over to Wangchuk.

LHADZOM

I also want to go to the county town.

WANGCHUK

Why? What are you going to do?

LHADZOM

I want to visit my grandmother.

WANGCHUK

Visit next time. Nobody will operate our shop if we both go to the county town. You can go next time, and I'll operate the shop.

LHADZOM

(angrily)

Don't lie and make excuses. Both you and my mother are unreliable. I can drive the car and visit Grandmother.

Lhadzom walks into the shop.

INT. WANGCHUK'S FAMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Drashi sips tea from a glass and looks at Lhadzom's swollen face.

DRASHI

Did you quarrel again? Did he beat you?

LHADZOM

No, he didn't beat me. We just squabbled.

DRASHI

It's better to divorce than quarrel like this. Where's Wangchuk?

LHADZOM

He went to the county town to meet a friend.

DRASHI

Oh.

Ngakwang enters the living room and sits next to Drashi.

DRASHI

Where have you been?

NGAKWANG

Playing in the backyard.

DRASHI

Where's your grandmother?

NGAKWANG

She's in the yard.

DRASHI

You don't need to go to school?

NGAKWANG

Today is Saturday.

DRASHI

I see.

Lhadzom refills Drashi's cup. Drashi looks at Lhadzom's cheek.

DRASHI

What's wrong with your cheek?

LHADZOM

Nothing.

DRASHI

It's red.

NGAKWANG

Father slapped her last night.

DRASHI

(puzzled)

Why? Why did he slap you?

LHADZOM

Forget it. I'm okay.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S SHOP - DAY

Drashi walks out of the room and mounts his motorcycle.

Lhadzom stands near Drashi.

DRASHI

I'm going home.

LHADZOM

Don't tell our parents Wangchuk beat me, or they'll be unhappy and worried.

DRASHI

Okay.

DRASHI drives away.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom is lying in her bed, a wet towel on her forehead. Lutso hands pills and a glass of lukewarm water to Lhadzom.

LUTSO

Take these pills. You'll be better if you take them.

Lhadzom raises her head while taking the wet towel from her forehead and placing it on her pillow. She touches her forehead.

LHADZOM

My fever is gone.

LUTSO

Great.

Lhadzom takes the pills and glass from Lutso. Lhadzom puts the pills in her mouth and sips water from the glass. She puts her head back on her pillow. Lutso pulls a big quilt over Lhadzom's head.

LUTSO

What do you want to eat? I'll cook for you.

LHADZOM

No, thanks. I don't want to eat.

LUTSO

You should eat. It's good for your cold.

LHADZOM

I have no appetite.

Two years later

EXT. MONASTERY - DAY

There is a big temple in the center of the monastery. Smoke rises from the altars.

Monks and old worshipers walk around the temple, circumambulating the stupas.

INT. TSOKO 'S HOME - DAY

A wooden bed is next to a window in a small room. Kitchen items are near bags containing food inside the room. A small wooden shelf in one corner of the living room has bowls and empty glasses. A long, narrow table is in another corner. Religious images, seven small copper bowls filled with water, a small image of a religious figure in a copper bowl full of water, and butter lamps are on the table.

TSOKO rinses two bowls in a basin near the living room door and tosses out the wash water.

Tsomo and Lhadzom sit near Grandmother.

TSOMO

Help your grandmother clean the bowls.

Lhadzom stands up and walks to Tsoko.

LHADZOM

Let me clean them.

TSOKO

I'll clean them. You're my guest. Sit. I'll serve tea.

Tsoko offers a plate of fried bread and bowls of milk tea to Tsomo and Lhadzom, then goes out to a small storeroom and brings back a bag of frozen yak ribs. She pours water into a pot, sets it on the stove, adds the ribs, and sprinkles some salt into it.

Tsoko gets the kettle from the stove, refills Tsomo and Lhadzom's bowls, and pours tea into her bowl. She sits next to Tsomo.

TSOKO

How's your son? Is he mischievous?

LHADZOM

He's good. He's really naughty. I didn't bring him with me today.

TSOKO

I want to meet my great-grandson. Please bring him the next time you visit.

LHADZOM

Okay. I'll bring him the next time I visit.

TSOKO

How are your husband and his mother?

LHADZOM

Good.

TSOKO

Good. How're Dele and Drashi?

TSOMO

Dele's good. Drashi will graduate soon.

TSOKO

Great. I haven't seen Drashi for a year.

TSOMO

Mother, I'll ask him to visit you soon.

TSOKO

Okay. Thanks.

After the water inside the pot boils for a few minutes, Tsoko takes the pot from the stove and places it near her kitchen items in the living room corner where she often sits. Transferring the meat into a plastic basin, she places it between Tsomo and Lhadzom.

TSOKO (CONT'D)

Please have some meat.

Tsoko hands each of them a knife.

Tsoko selects a rib from the basin and hands it to Lhadzom.

TSOKO (CONT'D)

Eat.

Lhadzom takes it from Tsoko and picks up the knife.

LHADZOM

Okay.

Tsomo cuts a piece of meat from a rib and gives it to Tsoko.

TSOMO

Mother, eat this.

Tsoko takes it.

TSOKO

You two must have more meat.

TSOKO (CONT'D)

Is your husband kind to you? Does he beat you?

LHADZOM

He's kind and never beats me.

TSOMO

Wangchuk's a good man. She's lucky she married him.

TSOKO

I'm very glad she married a good man. You're also lucky. Your husband never beats you and is kind to you. I'm glad you both have good husbands.

TSOMO

True. It is so important that a woman marries a good man!

TSOKO

Is your husband's mother kind to you?

LHADZOM

Yes, she's kind to me.

TSOKO

Great. How's town life?

LHADZOM

I don't need to herd yaks, so it's good.

TSOKO

Herding is hard work.

TSOMO

Right.

INT. TSOKO'S HOME - NIGHT

Lhadzom sips tea from her bowl and watches her phone.

LHADZOM

Tsoko, it's one AM. Shall we go to bed?

TSOKO

Wow! Time passes so quickly when we chat.

TSOMO

It's late. Let's go to bed.

INT. CAR – NEXT DAY

Lhadzom drives the car.

LHADZOM

Finally, I visited my grandmother with you.

TSOMO

You're a good granddaughter. You visited your grandmother and made her happy.

LHADZOM

I struggled to learn to drive a car. Now I can drive a car and visit my grandmother.

TSOMO

You're brave enough to drive a car. I'm afraid to drive a car.

LHADZOM

Why didn't you bring me to visit her when I was a child?

TSOMO

You told others whatever you saw and heard when you were a child. Each time I visited my mother, she asked, 'Is your husband kind to you? Does he beat you?' I always lied. You would have told the truth and made Mother unhappy if you had been with me. She arranged my marriage and worries a lot about me.

Tsomo says nothing and continues driving.

LHADZOM'S VOICE (V.O.)

I realized I had misunderstood my mother as a child. I often thought my mother didn't love me and didn't care about me, but the truth was that I was talkative and would have told Grandmother bad things and made her unhappy. Now I can forgive Mother for not taking me with her. I didn't bring my son with me to visit Grandmother. I'm sure he would have told her that my husband and I often quarrel, and sometimes he beats me. I don't want to make Mother and Grandmother unhappy and worry about me. I want them to be happy. I'm proud I faced difficulties, learned to drive a car, and visited Grandmother with Mother. The reason I learned to drive is to visit Grandmother. I misunderstood Mother. I accumulated a lot of sins by misunderstanding her. My paternal grandmother told me sins could be redeemed. The question is, how am I going to redeem these sins? Should I apologize to Mother or do a religious ritual?

They drive through a vast grassland leading to the county town.

EXT. COUNTY TOWN - DAY

Cars and motorcycles pass on the streets.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Lhadzom parks the car in front of a cloth shop. Tsomo and Lhadzom enter the shop. They check jackets and pants hanging on the wall.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Lhadzom parks the car on the side of the road. Lhadzom and Tsomo get out of the car and pee. They sit on the ground by each other.

LHADZOM

Mother, you love your mother a lot, right?

TSOMO

Stupid! Everyone loves their mothers a lot.

AHP #65 ལྷ་མོ་གྲོ་ལོ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by ལྷ་མོ་འཕྲིན་ལག། Gu ru 'phrin las
Lhadzom smiles and leans her head against Tsomo's shoulder.

LHADZOM

You're a good mother. I love you.

Tsomo smiles and tilts her head down.

They later get in the car and drive down the road through endless grassland leading to their homes.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - NIGHT

Lutso sits on the cot where Drashi sleeps. She squints at Lhadzom. Lhadzom sits on a stool and leans against the wall. Wangchuk sits next to Lhadzom.

WANGCHUK

What did you buy in the county town?

LHADZOM

A pair of pants.

Lhadzom takes the pants from a plastic bag.

WANGCHUK

For me?

LHADZOM

For myself.

WANGCHUK

Okay, but maybe pants are not suitable for you.

Lutso squints at Lhadzom and starts to say something but stops.

INT. TEA PLACE - DAY

Wangchuk and three men sit around a square table in a private room. Several other men sit beside or stand behind them and watch as they play cards.

A thick stack of cash sits on the table before each player.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Wangchuk and his friend lie on beds in a hotel room.

FRIEND

When are you going home?

WANGCHUK

In a few days. I can't go home yet. Someone told my mother and my wife about my gambling. They'll scold me if I go home soon.

FRIEND

Right. How much did you lose today?

WANGCHUK

Around ten thousand.

FRIEND

You're a good gambler. You'll earn it back soon.

WANGCHUK

I'm not lucky these days, so I won't gamble for a while.

Wangchuk dials a number.

On the other end, a WOMAN answers.

WOMAN

Today must be a good day. You called me. Where are you?

WANGCHUK

I'm in a hotel in the county town. Are you in the county town?

WOMAN

Yes.

WANGCHUK

Are you alone?

WOMAN

Yes.

WANGCHUK

Long time no see. Shall we meet tonight?

FRIEND gets up from the bed, walks to the washroom, and washes his face.

FRIEND comes back to his bed. Wangchuk looks at his friend.

WANGCHUK

My girlfriend will come in around ten minutes. Can you move to another room?

FRIEND

Okay. Who is she?

WANGCHUK

I'll tell you tomorrow.

A month later

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOUSE YARD - DAY

Lutso sits in an armchair, basking in the sun in the yard. Wangchuk joins her.

LUTSO

Stop gambling. If you don't, I'll jump into the Yellow River.

Wangchuk squats next to Lutso and clutches her hand.

WANGCHUK

Mother, I'll stop gambling.

LUTSO

I can't live with your wife. A few days ago, she wore the pants she bought from the county town. It's disgusting. I have never seen a herdsman wear pants before this. What's wrong with her? She's out of her mind. She drives a motorcycle and a car and wears pants. Her odd behavior is destroying our family's reputation.

WANGCHUK

You didn't let her drive a motorcycle. We can't stop her. She isn't enslaved. There is nothing wrong with her driving a car to visit her grandmother. Who will you live with if you don't live with us?

LUTSO

It's good for you if you think what your wife is doing is good. My sister lives near the monastery. I'm old and will die soon. I need to chant scriptures. I have no time to deal with your wife's business.

WANGCHUK

I hope you continue living with us. Others will gossip about our family if you don't live with us.

LUTSO

I told you I couldn't live with her. Let others say whatever they want. We can't zip others' mouths.

LUTSO

(pondering)

If I can't go live with my sister, I prefer to herd yaks in the mountains instead of living in this boring town. I told you often to buy some yaks and return to a herding life, but you always refused.

WANGCHUK

Mother, you're old, and you can't herd yaks. You can't herd yaks ever again. It's now time for you to enjoy your life. Maybe you don't realize how wonderful your life is in town. You don't need to herd in harsh weather as you did in the past. You don't need to do anything except rest the whole day.

LUTSO

The most boring thing is to do nothing all day. I miss the herding life, even if it's hard. I never felt bored to death when I was herding yaks.

WANGCHUK

Mother, we can't return and herd yaks. Your grandson is attending school in town. We live in town and have to take care of him.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Lhadzom packs Lutso's clothes into bags.

INT. CAR - DAY

Wangchuk glances at Lutso as he drives the car.

WANGCHUK

Mother, this year you are staying with your sister. Next year, I'll build a house for you next to your sister's home.

LUTSO

Okay. Please stop gambling. You'll lose all our family's property. Gambling is sinful. It makes you a bad person.

WANGCHUK

Yes, mother. I'll stop gambling.

LUTSO

Son, don't be too kind to your wife, or she'll control you.

WANGCHUK

If she tries to control me, I'll kick her out of our family.

LUTSO

Not easy to get a divorce. Sometimes you should stop her from doing crazy things. No herdsman drives a car or motorcycle in our community.

WANGCHUK

Okay. A woman who works for the local government drives a car.

LUTSO

They're different. She's a government clerk. Your wife is a herdsman.

Wangchuk nods.

INT. WANGCHUK'S SHOP - DAY

Wangchuk stands near the entrance of the shop. Lhadzom stands near the display case.

WANGCHUK

Now, are you happy? You often told me that my mother bothered you all the time.

LHADZOM

She doesn't want to live with us. I didn't ask her to leave.

WANGCHUK

You often say a lot of nonsense.

Wangchuk leaves.

EXT. CAR - DAY

As Wangchuk gets in the car and starts the engine, Lhadzom exits the shop.

LHADZOM

Where are you going?

WANGCHUK

I'm going to the county town. I have to meet a friend.

LHADZOM

What business are you going to do with your friend?

WANGCHUK

None of your business.

Wangchuk drives away.

Music

Lhadzom watches Wangchuk drives away.

A few months later.

INT. WANGCHUK'S SHOP - DAY

Gangdron enters the shop. Lhadzom sits on a stool in the shop. She stands when she sees Gangdron.

LHADZOM

What a great day! How are you, Sister? (Cousin) You've lost a lot of weight. Are you sick?

GANGDRON

I'm good. I herded yaks on foot and lost weight. We haven't seen each other for a long time.

LHADZOM

Right. You should ride a horse and a yak when you herd. I'm so glad you came to see me!

GANGDRON

I pity horses and yaks, so I rarely ride them. How's business?

Lhadzom points to the empty shelves.

LHADZOM

Not good. All the shelves are empty. Wangchuk rarely stays at home, and I can't go to the county town to buy supplies to sell in the shop.

GANGDRON

Don't worry about business. You are lucky. You don't need to herd yaks like me.

LHADZOM

Right, I have no hard work to do. What brought you here?

GANGDRON

Some of my cousins and friends will go on a pilgrimage to Lhasa. One of them asked me to join them. I told my husband, and he agreed. I came to town to buy some stuff.

LHADZOM

Great!

GANGDRON

You can join us if you like. You can ask your husband.

LHADZOM

I want to go to Lhasa with you. When will you start?

GANGDRON

The day after tomorrow. We'll gather in town tomorrow morning.

LHADZOM

Okay.

GANGDRON

I'm taking off. I have to buy a raincoat.

LHADZOM

Bye.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - NIGHT

Lhadzom calls Wangchuk, but there is no answer.

INT. TEA PLACE - NIGHT

Wangchuk and three other people sit around a table in a private room playing cards.

Wangchuk reads his wife's message on his phone's screen as his phone rings. He turns the phone off.

WANGCHUK

It's my wife. I can't answer.

PLAYER 1

Are you afraid of your wife?

WANGCHUK

Someone told my wife I'm gambling. She'll scold me.

PLAYER 1

Kidding, Brother.

INT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - NIGHT

Lhadzom dials again and again. No answer.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Pilgrims have packs on their backs, hold long sticks, and walk along a road.

Lhadzom wraps her head with a red scarf and walks near Gangdron.

GANGDRON

Did you talk to your husband about this journey?

LHADZOM

No. I didn't tell him.

GANGDRON

You should tell him. He'll scold you. Why didn't you tell him?

LHADZOM

It's okay. I'll call later and tell him I'm going to Lhasa with you. He'll not worry about me if I'm with you.

GANGDRON

What about your son?

LHADZOM

I told him to visit his grandmother if his father comes home this weekend. He stays at school on weekdays.

GANGDRON

Good. Don't worry about your son.

LHADZOM'S VOICE (V.O.)

I lied to my cousin. I called my husband many times. He didn't answer. I'm sure he'll scold me if I don't ask for his permission to go to Lhasa with my relatives and friends. But I realized my husband doesn't care much about me. I don't want to tell my cousin my husband doesn't care about me. She'll pity me.

A few days later

EXT. WANGCHUK'S CAR - DAY

Wangchuk gets out of his car and notices his family's locked door. Wangchuk walks to the window and looks inside. He takes his phone from his pants pocket and dials it.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Lhadzom's phone rings. Lhadzom takes her phone from her jacket pocket and answers.

WANGCHUK

Where are you?

LHADZOM

On the way to Lhasa.

WANGCHUK

What? Are you on your way to Lhasa?

LHADZOM

Yes.

WANGCHUK

Who gave you permission to go to Lhasa? Why didn't you tell me?

LHADZOM

I called you, but you didn't answer.

EXT. WANGCHUK'S HOME - DAY

Wangchuk kicks the door.

WANGCHUK

Crazy woman! Where's the key?

LHADZOM

I left the key with a neighbor.

Wangchuk kicks the door again and hangs up.

EXT. ROAD - SUNSET

Lhadzom tries to call back but then puts the phone in her pocket and resumes walking.

Gangdron waits for Lhadzom.

EXT. GRASSLAND - SUNSET

The sun sets.

Men pitch small tents and set up three-stone hearths.

Women fetch water and dry yak dung. They make fires, and smoke rises.

They cook instant noodles and make *zamba*.

LHADZOM

When will we reach Lhasa?

OLDER MAN

A month to go.

YOUNG MAN

Great! I enjoy walking. Normally I wouldn't say I like to walk, but I enjoy walking with you.

LHADZOM

Before, I didn't know walking on green grassland across the mountains was so joyful.

OLDER MAN

You can enjoy walking for a month.

Others laugh.

EXT. GRASSLAND - NIGHT

Pilgrims sit in a circle around a big fire near their tents. They sing.

CHORUS

I want to go to Lhasa

I want to worship the Jo bo

Hold *khadak* and worship ...

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Men hold bottles of water, chase women, and spray water on them. A young man grabs a woman's hand and pulls her toward the river, but she slips on the riverbank and falls into the water.

Everyone laughs.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Lhadzom and Gangdron go to bed in a small tent.

LHADZOM

Sister, do you feel free from worry? I'm not worried about anything.

GANGDRON

These are the happiest, worry-free moments of my life.

LHADZOM

I don't feel tired even though my feet are a bit sore.

GANGDRON

My feet aren't painful. I often herd yaks on foot, so I'm used to walking.

LHADZOM

I can't sleep tonight. Can you tell me a story? I like to listen to stories. My paternal grandmother told me stories when I couldn't sleep as a child.

GANGDRON

I'm not a good storyteller. I've forgotten almost all the stories I once knew.

LHADZOM

Just tell whatever story you remember.

GANGDRON

Long ago, there was a princess...

EXT. TENTS - NIGHT

Lights in the scattered tents are still on. The tents are like stars in the sky on a dark night.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

Pilgrims reach a mountain peak. They see a wide-open valley from the mountain.
Antelopes are grazing.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Lhadzom washes her feet in a river, then joins Gangdron, sitting under a big tree.

A gentle breeze makes the green leaves tremble.

Lhadzom is lying on the ground under the tree with outstretched legs and arms, facing the sky.

LHADZOM

I'm so happy! This journey is the happiest time of my life. I hope this journey never ends!

GANGDRON

Impossible. It will end in ten days.

LHADZOM

I want to take another trip again. Let's take a trip next year.

GANGDRON

I also want to go to Lhasa again. But I'll not be free. I have to herd yaks and do family chores. I'm not a free woman like you. I don't know if my husband will let me go to Lhasa again.

LHADZOM

There is no reason always to do whatever your husband orders.

Gangdron looks at Lhadzon and says nothing. Other pilgrims put on their backpacks and resume walking. Gangdron stands and packs her backpack.

GANGDRON

Get up. Others are leaving.

LHADZOM

Let me lie under the tree for a bit.

LHADZOM'S VOICE (V.O)

I enjoy lying under this tree, thinking about nothing, just enjoying the moment. I really hope this journey never ends. Unfortunately, it'll end soon.

Lhadzom reluctantly stands, puts on her backpack, and joins Gangdron.

An airplane flies overhead. They gaze into the sky, observing the plane as it appears and disappears among clumps of thick clouds.

LHADZOM (points into the sky)

Wow! It's so high!

GANGDRON

Where is it going? Do people on the plane feel like they are flying?

LHADZOM

I don't know, maybe Lhasa or somewhere. It must feel like flying.

GANGDRON

I wonder what the feeling is to look down at the earth. Maybe we can see our homes, the Potala, see the whole world!

LHADZOM (stares at the plane)

Possibly. I want to be on a plane, look down at the world, and feel what a bird feels.

As the airplane disappears, they join the other pilgrims.

EXT. GRASSLAND - DAY

The pilgrims walk through the vast grassland.

45

THE PAINTING

Dondrub	Tsomo's boyfriend
Gonkyi	Tsomo's math teacher
Lutso	Tsomo's schoolmate
Wangchuk	Tsomo's teacher
Samko	A waiter
Chukyi	Tsomo's classmate
Tubden	Tsomo's painting teacher
Tsomo	Chukyi's classmate

EXT. SPORTS FIELD - SUNSET

TSOMO, a tall, slim, good-looking university student, sits on a grassy patch and leans against a big tree. Her long black hair falls around her shoulders. Leaves falling from the tree scatter around her. She paints stars on a piece of blue paper. A gentle wind moves a strand of hair near her cheek.

Her phone vibrates 'zer'. She ignores it.

She stops painting and glances at a woman chasing her boyfriend on the sports field.

INT. CAFETERIA

She sits at a table near a window with a plate of rice and vegetable dishes. Other students sit in pairs or groups, chatting loudly. She leaves half the food on her plate and exits the dining hall.

INT. DORM - NIGHT

Tsomo sits on a chair next to her bunk bed. PHYUG SKYID, her classmate, a short, plump woman, combs her short hair while chatting with Tsomo.

CHUKYI

Where were you this evening?

TSOMO

On the sports field.

CHUKYI

Why didn't you come to the Chinese class?

TSOMO

I forgot.

CHUKYI

I texted you.

Tsomo takes her cell phone from her pants pocket and checks the text.

TSOMO

Sorry, I missed it.

CHUKYI

It's okay.

Tsomo gets a phone call and leaves the dorm room.

INT. DORM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

She talks on the phone at one end of the corridor, resting her elbows on a windowsill.
After talking on the phone, she enters the dorm room.

INT. CLASSROOM - NEXT MORNING

Tsomo sits at the back of the classroom. She puts a paper on her desk, holds a pencil in her right hand, and continues drawing an unfinished star. Her head is lowered, and she pays no attention to her math teacher, GONKYI.

GONKYI comes over, takes her drawing paper, crumples it in her hand, and throws it in a garbage bin.

GONKYI

This is a math class, not an art class.

Tsomo keeps her head down, not daring to look at the teacher.

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Chukyi comes over to Tsomo when the class is over.

CHUKYI

Let's go have lunch.

TSOMO

Okay.

INT. CAFETERIA - NOON

Tsomo sits at a table with Chukyi and eats a plate of rice with fried cabbage. Chukyi eats a plate of rice with fried shrimp.

Chukyi offers a shrimp to Tsomo.

CHUKYI

Would you like to try one?

TSOMO

No. I don't eat shrimp.

CHUKYI

It's tasty. Why don't you try?

TSOMO

It's sinful. You have to eat lots of shrimp if you want to feel full.

CHUKYI

Okay.

CHUKYI

Come on. Are you sure? You can try (offering a shrimp to Tsomo). It's tasty!

TSOMO

No, thanks!

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - AFTERNOON

Chukyi says goodbye to Tsomo near their dormitory and goes inside for a nap. Tsomo sits on a bench under a nearby tree. She takes paper and pen from her shoulder bag and draws more stars on blue paper.

INT. CLASSROOM - EVENING

Tsomo puts a piece of blue paper on her desk, continues drawing, and doesn't listen to her Chinese teacher, WANGCHUK.

Teacher WANGCHUK walks up to Tsomo, observes what she's doing, and starts to say something but stops. Instead, he nods and continues to focus on teaching.

INT. OFFICE - EVENING

Wangchuk is the teacher responsible for Tsomo's class. He sits in a chair at his desk strewn with books, a desk computer, and a cup.

WANGCHUK

What interests you?

Tsomo doesn't say anything. She keeps her head down.

WANGCHUK

Are you interested in art?

TSOMO

Yeah.

WANGCHUK

Then change your major to painting. Last time, your math score was very low. You shouldn't major in math.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - NIGHT

Tsomo sits on a stone stool by a road, holding an umbrella over her head. Rain drips to the ground from her umbrella. She looks as cars splash water on the road and students walk by in pairs. Some male students share umbrellas with female students.

Chukyi calls Tsomo. They are no longer classmates, but they share the same dorm room. She answers Chukyi's call and walks to her dorm.

Water trickles from her umbrella. She is consumed by depression.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Tsomo sits in the middle of the classroom, painting.

Her painting teacher, Tubden, wears a smart suit. His hair is combed back. He writes on the board and explains important terms.

Tubden walks over to Tsomo's painting, picks up her painting from her desk, and scrutinizes it.

INT. OFFICE - NOON

In Tubden's office, many paintings hang on the walls. He pours tea into a paper cup for Tsomo. She sits on a sofa and puts her cup on a table next to the couch.

TUBDEN

I like your painting.

Tsomo smiles but doesn't say anything.

TUBDEN

It's good that you paint. You should listen during classes. You will learn key information that will help you. You'll produce masterpieces if you improve your understanding of painting.

TSOMO

Right.

EXT. SHOP - AFTERNOON

Tsomo and Chukyi are in a shop. Tsomo buys a canvas and paintbrush.

EXT. SPORT FIELD - EVENING

Tsomo and Chukyi sit under a big tree. Tsomo draws a girl holding an umbrella over her head, standing by a road on a rainy day.

CHUKYI

Who are you painting?

TSOMO

Who do you think I'm painting?

Chukyi looks carefully at the painting.

CHUKYI

I don't know.

CHUKYI (CONT'D)

Why do you paint this girl?

TSOMO

It's a class assignment. My teacher said each student must paint a picture.

Tsomo focuses on her work.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Tubden puts Tsomo's painting on his desk and carefully studies it.

TUBDEN

I like your painting. It's great!

TSOMO

Really?

TUBDEN

Yeah. The sad expression on the girl's face suggests her turbulent inner world.

Tsomo smiles and doesn't say much.

Tubden returns the drawing to Tsomo and touches her hands.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Tsomo is in a bar crammed with people. She wears a white shirt, black pants, and black shoes and clutches a red purse.

Men and women are smoking. Smoke wafts about in long, lazy swirls. The DJ plays music as people dance and drink madly. Colorful lights shine and dazzle Tsomo.

Tsomo, perched on a stool near the front desk, drinks from a beer bottle. She takes a small mirror from her purse and applies red lipstick. She examines her beautiful eyes and red lips in the mirror. She feels good.

A tall man wearing nice clothes brings a glass of beer and sits by Tsomo. He raises his glass to Tsomo. She picks up her bottle of beer from the table. They clink the glass and bottle

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and sip beer. He eventually takes Tsomo to a table where his friends are drinking.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Tsomo and the tall man are lying on a big bed.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - EVENING

Tsomo sits alone on the bank of a koi pond. She dials a number but receives no answer.
She sadly gazes at the bright goldfish swimming in the pond.

Chukyi walks near the pond a little later, sees Tsomo, and joins her.

EXT. DORM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Tsomo stands at the end of the corridor and dials the same number as before. There is no
answer.

INT. CLASSROOM - EVENING

Tsomo is extremely unhappy and not in the mood to listen. Her painting teacher, Tubden,
looks at her. He wants to say something, but no words emerge.

INT. THUB BSTAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tubden offers tea to Tsomo, who sits in a padded chair. She looks around the living room.
A photo of Tubden and his wife is on the TV table.

Paintings hang on the living room walls.

TUBDEN

What's happened to you?

TSOMO

Nothing (low voice).

Tubden sits next to Tsomo.

TUBDEN

Why were you unhappy today? Something must have happened.

TSOMO

Nothing happened.

TUBDEN

Tell me the truth. I can help you if you need help.

EXT. SWIMMING POOL - NOON NEXT Day

Tsomo dives into a swimming pool and floats, her face to the sky.

She climbs out of the pool and sits in a chair. When a young man approaches and tries to chat, she jumps back into the water.

EXT. SCHOOL GATE - EVENING

Tsomo meets Chukyi at the school gate.

CHUKYI

Where have you been?

TSOMO

I went swimming.

CHUKYI

Where were you last night? You didn't return to the dorm.

TSOMO (looking uncomfortable)

I visited my friend and stayed at her home last night

They walk through the gate and to their dorm room.

INT. CAFE - LATE EVENING

Chukyi sits near a window and waits for Tsomo. When Tsomo approaches, she throws herself into her arms.

CHUKYI

You're here!

TSOMO

Sorry for being so late.

CHUKYI

Nevermind. I ordered pizza, two cups of orange juice, and a fruit salad. Do you want to eat something else?

TSOMO

No.

Tsomo takes off her coat and puts it on a nearby chair. The waiter, Samko, brings their food and drinks.

CHUKYI

Thanks!

SAMKO

You're welcome.

Chukyi hands a slice of pizza to Tsomo.

CHUKYI

Eat this.

Tsomo takes it from Chukyi.

TSOMO

Thanks!

Chukyi holds her cup, and Tsomo does the same.

CHUKYI

Cheers!

TSOMO

Cheers!

After they finish eating, Chukyi calls the waiter.

CHUKYI

Hello, waiter.

SAMKO

What do you want?

CHUKYI

Two bottles of beer.

SAMKO

Anything else?

CHUKYI

No.

Chukyi orders six bottles of beer after finishing the first bottle. She is already a little drunk. Over the next two hours, she drinks the six bottles of beer. Tsomo drinks only one bottle of beer because she knows Chukyi is drunk, and she'll have to help her.

CHUKYI (CONT'D)

You're beautiful.

TSOMO

No. I'm not beautiful.

CHUKYI

You're gorgeous. I'm not flattering you. It's true.

TSOMO

I don't think I'm beautiful.

CHUKYI

You are beautiful. I like you.

TSOMO is shocked.

TSOMO

What?

CHUKYI

I said I love you. Do you love me?

TSOMO

You're drunk. We should leave.

AHP #65 ལྷོག་ལམ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by ལུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལམ། Gu ru 'phrin las
Chukyi walks unsteadily. Tsomo helps her.

INT. DORM - MORNING

Tsomo works on her star painting and sits at her desk near her bed. Chukyi wakes up, yawns, stretches her hands into the air, and looks at Tsomo.

CHUKYI

You're up early.

TSOMO

Yeah.

CHUKYI

What are you painting?

TSOMO

Some stars.

CHUKYI

Interesting! Was I drunk last night? I can't remember how I got back here.

TSOMO

You were a little drunk. I brought you back here.

CHUKYI

Thank you. I'm not going to drink anymore.

Chukyi gets up and washes her face.

CHUKYI (CONT'D)

I'll get food for us. What do you want?

TSOMO

We can go together.

CHUKYI

No. You work on your painting. I'll get food for us.

TSOMO

I want a bowl of noodles with fried eggs and tomatoes.

CHUKYI

Okay. Do you need something to drink?

TSOMO

No. Thanks.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

Tsomo begins painting a big tree under a clear sky with stars on the blue paper.

INT. DORM

Tsomo stands at the window of her dorm. She sees a beautiful young woman get out of a fancy car. A tall young man also steps out of the car and follows her. He wears a white jacket, black pants, and black leather shoes. He takes several designer bags from the car and hands them to the beautiful young woman. Tsomo realizes the woman is Lutso.

Tsomo knows Lutso has a rich boyfriend whose father owns a mining company. Her boyfriend often buys nice clothes and bags for her. Most students admire her.

Tsomo stares at Lutso, who holds the bags in her hands, says goodbye to her boyfriend, and enters her dorm building opposite Tsomo.

INT. TUBDEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tubden is on the phone, arguing with his wife, who works in another city.

Tubden picks up a vase full of flowers from a table near the window. He throws it against the wall. The vase shatters. Ceramic shards fly as water slowly trickles down the wall.

INT. SHOP

Tubden buys twenty-four bottles of beer and some snacks in a shop.

EXT. KOI POND

Tsomo sits near the fish pond listening to music through her earphones while watching the fish swimming.

Her phone vibrates. A call from her painting teacher. She answers.

TSOMO

Okay.

INT. TUBDEN'S APARTMENT

Tubden opens a beer bottle for Tsomo and grabs another beer bottle. There are five empty bottles on the table.

Tsomo drinks two bottles of beer. Tubden drinks the rest of the beer and is drunk.

Tubden stands at the door of his bedroom. His body sways back and forth. He looks at Tsomo sitting on the sofa.

TUBDEN

Come here (hand gesture).

Tsomo looks at him and stays still. Tubden walks unsteadily to Tsomo and grabs her right hand. She reluctantly follows him. She doesn't resist.

They enter his bedroom. He closes the door.

EXT. SWIMMING POOL - NEXT DAY

Tsomo dives into the water and comes out after a minute. She exhales and inhales deeply. She floats on the water's surface, gazing into the sky.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Tsomo walks on the sidewalk, wearing sunglasses.

She gets a call from Dondrub, her class monitor.

DONDRUB

Where were you? Why didn't you come to the afternoon painting class?

TSOMO (lying)

I'm sick.

DONDRUB

Did you talk to Teacher Tubden?

TSOMO

Yes.

DONDRUB

That's good. ...

She hangs up.

INT. LIBRARY - SUNSET

Tsomo continues to work on her star painting and paints two girls under the tree.

INT. CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

Tubden enters the classroom and puts his book and cup on the teacher's desk. He looks at his wristwatch.

TUBDEN

We'll start class in five minutes.

He leaves the classroom.

Tsomo leaves the classroom after Tubden leaves. Tsomo encounters her classmate, Chokyi, near the classroom entrance.

CHOKYI

Where are you going? Our class begins in three minutes.

TSOMO

I won't be there.

Not knowing what to say, Chokyi enters the classroom.

EXT. LAWN - SAME DAY

Tsomo lies on her back on the grass, puts her earphones in, and listens to music.

An empty beer bottle is on the ground next to her.

EXT. SPORT FIELD - NIGHT

Tsomo sits under a big tree. Having finished her star painting, she holds it up and looks at it.

AHP #65 རྒྱལ་ལའ། *TIBETAN WHISPERS* by གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལག། Gu ru 'phrin las
Tsomo calls Chukyi, who arrives a few minutes later and sits next to Tsomo.

TSOMO gives her the painting.

TSOMO

Thank you for being a good friend. You're always kind to me.

Chukyi takes the painting.

CHUKYI

No need to thank me.

TSOMO

You are always kind to me.

Chukyi doesn't respond. She gazes at the painting.

The painting features a large tree with a streetlamp nearby and stars in the sky. Beneath the tree, a girl lies on her back with her head in the other girl's lap. They look at each other with big smiles.

Chukyi smiles at Tsomo. Tsomo smiles back and hugs Chukyi.

TSOMO

I love you!

They embrace under the big tree. Lights from the street and buildings ornament the campus.

The dark, blue sky brims with dim but still-sparkling stars.

TIBETAN TERMS

Achoalo, a mchod a lo ཨ་མཚོ་དང་ཨ་ལོ།
 batsa, pa tsa བ་ཙ།
 Badkho, pad kho བད་ཁོ།
 Badlo, pad lo བད་ལོ།
 Badma, pad ma བད་མ།
 Badmo, pad mo བད་མོ།
 Badtso, pad mtsho བད་མཚོ།
 Beldzom, dpal 'dzoms དཔལ་འཛོམས།
 Belzang, dpal bzang དཔལ་བཟང་།
 Chodron, chos sgron མོས་སྒྲོན།
 Chokyi, chos skyid མོས་སྐྱིད།
 Chukyi, phyug skyid རྩུག་སྐྱིད།
 Dabo, zla po ལྷ་པོ།
 Dawa, zla ba ལྷ་བ།
 Dechok, bde mchog བདེ་མཚོག
 Dekyi, bde skyid བདེ་སྐྱིད།
 Dele, bde legs བདེ་ལེགས།
 Delo, de lo དེ་ལོ།
 Deechong, dus chung དུས་ཚུང་།
 Denba, bstan pa བསྟན་པ།
 Dobo, do po ཏོ་པོ།
 Donbe, don pe ཏོན་པེ།
 Dondrub, don grub ཏོན་གུབ།
 Donlo, don lo ཏོན་ལོ།
 Dongnyi, stong nyid ལྷོང་ཉིད།
 Dorje, rdo rje ཏོར་ཇེ།
 Dorlo, rdor lo ཏོར་ལོ།
 Dradon, bkra don བརྟ་དོན།
 Drako, bkra kho བརྟ་ཁོ།
 Drakyi, dra jid བརྟ་ཁྱིད།
 Drala, bkra lha བརྟ་ལྷ།
 Dralo, bkra lo བརྟ་ལོ།
 Drashinamgar, bkra shis rnam dkar
 བརྟ་ཤིས་རྣམ་དཀར།
 Drashi, bkra shis བརྟ་ཤིས།
 Drayang, bkra g.yang བརྟ་གཡང་།
 Drakba, grags pa གྲགས་པ།
 dremo, 'dre mo འདྲེ་མོ།

dretru, 'dre phrug འདྲེ་ཕུག
 Drogon, 'gro mgon འགྲོ་མགོན།
 Drolma, sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།
 Dudul, bdud 'dul བདུད་འདུལ།
 Duntso, dung mtsho དུང་མཚོ།
 Dzebo, mdzes po མཛེས་པོ།
 Dzombe, 'dzoms pe འཛོམས་པེ།
 Galung, dga' lung དགའ་ལུང་།
 Gangdron, gangs sgron གངས་སྒྲོན།
 Golok, mgo log མགོ་ལོག
 Gonkyi, mgon skyid མགོན་སྐྱིད།
 Gurutrinle, gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྱིན་ལས།
 Guru, gu ru གུ་རུ།
 Gyatso, rgya mtsho ལྷ་མཚོ།
 Horgor, hor skor ཏོར་སྐོར།
 Jalu, skya lu ལྷ་ལཱ།
 Jamgoon, 'jam mgon འཇམ་མགོན།
 Jamlu, 'jam lu འཇམ་ལཱ།
 Jizhun, gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།
 Jowo, jo bo ཇོ་བོ།
 Kangsar, khang sar ཁང་སར།
 khadak, kha btags ཁ་བཏགས།
 Kyidzom, skyid 'dzoms ལྱིད་འཛོམས།
 Kyiko, skyid kho ལྱིད་ཁོ།
 Kyilo, skyid lo ལྱིད་ལོ།
 lama, bla ma ལྷ་མ།
 Lhadron, lha sgron ལྷ་སྒྲོན།
 Lhadzom, lha 'dzoms ལྷ་འཛོམས།
 Lhaki, lha skyid ལྷ་སྐྱིད།
 Lhamotso, lha mo 'tsho ལྷ་མོ་འཚོ།
 Lhamo, lha mo ལྷ་མོ།
 Lhasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།
 Lutso, klu mtsho ལུ་མཚོ།
 mani, ma ni མ་ཉི།
 Mintang, smin thang མྱིན་ཐང་།
 Nangssngamo'ithalbagyong,
 dgongphyidro'ithalbagrog, nangs
 snga mo'i thal gyong, dgong phyi
 dro'i thal grog དགོང་ཕྱི་རྩི་ཐལ་གྱི་ནངས་ལྷ་མོའི་ཐལ་

གྱིང་།
 Nekyab, gnas skyabs གནས་སྐྱབས།
 Ngakwang, ngag dbang ངག་དབང་།
 Ngekyolalongwayinkubamin, ngas
 khyod la slong ba yin, rkus pa min
 ངས་ཁྱེད་ལ་སློང་བ་ཡིན། རུས་པ་མིན།
 Nyima, nyi ma ཉི་མ།
 ommanibemehum, om ma ni pad me
 hu+om མོ་མ་ཏི་པད་མེ་ཏུ།
 Pakba, 'phags pa འཕགས་པ།
 Pujup, Pu jup ཕུར་རྒྱལ།
 Purtsa, phur 'tsho ཕུར་འཚོ།
 rangnyiranggigonyin, rang nyid rang
 gi mgon yin རང་ཉིད་རང་གི་མགོན་ཡིན།
 Ruchin, ru chen རུ་ཆེན།
 Samko, bsam kho བསམ་མོ།
 Sanggye, sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱས།
 Shango, sran mgo ཤན་མགོ།
 Shebo, sher bo ཤེར་པོ།
 Sodrak, bsod grags བསོད་གྲགས།
 Tanggar, thang dkar ཐང་དཀར།
 Tanggnye, thang rnyed ཐང་རྟེན།
 Tarbum, thar 'bum ཐར་འབུམ།
 Tarwa, thar ba ཐར་བ།
 Trinbo, 'phrin po འཕྲིན་པོ།
 Tsebe, tshe pe ཆེ་པ།
 Tsebo, tshe po ཆེ་པོ།
 Tsedon, tshe brtan ཆེ་བརྟན།

Tsedon, tshe don ཆེ་དོན།
 Tsegon, tshe mgon ཆེ་མགོན།
 Tseko, tshe kho ཆེ་ཁ།
 Tsekyi, tshe skyid ཆེ་སྐྱིད།
 Tselo, tshe lo ཆེ་ལོ།
 Tseringdrashi, tshe ring bkra shis
 ཆེ་རིང་བགྲ་ཤིས།
 Tsering, tshe ring ཆེ་རིང་།
 Tsetso, tshe mtsho ཆེ་མཚོ།
 Tseyangtso, tshe g.yang mtsho ཆེ་གཡང་མཚོ།
 Tsezang, tshe bzang ཆེ་བཟང་།
 Tsoko, mtsho kho མཚོ་ཁ།
 Tsomo, mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ།
 Tsongon, mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།
 Tsoyag, mtsho yag མཚོ་ཡག།
 Tsonko, brtson kho བཙུན་ཁ།
 Tsongbu, 'tshogs po འཚོགས་པོ།
 Tubden, thub bstan ཐུབ་བསྐྱེད།
 Wanbo, ban po བན་པོ།
 Wanlo, ban lo, བན་ལོ།
 Wangchuk, dbang phyug དབང་ཕྱུག།
 Wogee, bo gces བོ་གཅེས།
 Yangchen, dbyangs can དབྱངས་ཅན།
 Yangmu, g.yang mo གཡང་མོ།
 Yangru, g.yangru གཡང་རུ།
 zamba, rtsam pa རྩམ་པ།
 Zanglo, bzang lo བཟང་ལོ།

CHINESE TERMS

Banma 班玛

Chongqing 重庆

Feifei 菲菲

Gerichengli 格日成立

Guoluo 果洛

Hanhan 韩韩

Huoerguo 霍尔果

Jiangjiang 江江

Jiuzhi 久治

Kaka 卡卡

Kangsai 康赛

Mentang 门堂

Qinghai 青海

Shanghai 上海

Shenzhen 深圳

Sichuan 四川

Suohurima 索呼日麻

Xi'an 西安